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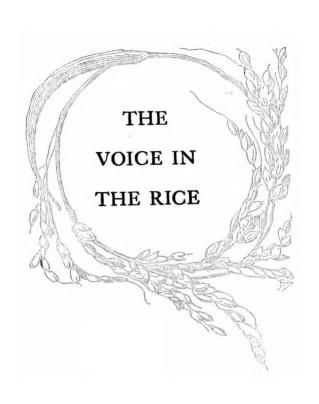
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The voice in the rice, 1924 009 600 077



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"We paused, side by side, for some moments, before attempting the manœuvre" (page 3)

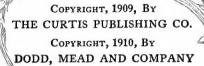


BY GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

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With Illustrations by J. C. LEYENDECKER And Decorations by BERTHA STUART

NEW YORK
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To Frederick Hale

We have read the poets together, Alice in Wonderland, and Pickwick. Our friendship is growing old as the hills. But it is a one-sided affair.

I have had from you, whenever I was minded to use them, food, smoke, drink, bed, a razor, the open fire, and the affectionate welcome, under the hospitable roof: a horse to ride on, a table to write on; new and admired friends, and now and again a nearby look at the celebrated and the great.

To meet this preposterous bill I have never had any funds, save affection for you, and belief in you. But I shall not easily square the matter with these; for such funds are yours, too, to draw from, and for many years now and with both hands you have showered them on me.

It were laughable to suppose that a grown man should offer, as a return for so much, an incompetent romance (and one of his own into the bargain). Don't suppose it. For this, my friend is not properly a dedication to you, of a book; it is rather an open, and an unashamed confession of bankruptcy.

G. M.

Aiken, S. C.

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I. TWO BUNGLERS

night came on monstrously rough and windy, but clear. I remember how when the S. S. Major Pickins rolled, the stars flew past my port like streams of sparks from the smokestack of a locomotive. You weren't safe in your berth, or out of it. We had on board a number of horses, with their grooms, bound for New York from various winter resorts in the South, and during a particularly violent lurch of the vessel one of these poor beasts fell and splintered its leg, and could be heard screaming with the pain, like a lost soul, until mercifully put to death. The passengers were mostly servants of Northern families. whether they were more sick than frightened, or more frightened than sick, was a question for a more experienced seafarer than myself.

We made slow work of it; the antiquated engine was loose in the pins; the coal supply at Charleston for the run to New York clinkered into obdurate masses, impermeable to flame, and the wind and seas came against us like all possessed. If the captain could

have seen his way to it he would have turned and run back to port; but he did not believe that his command could weather a turn. Her best chance was to buck the seas.

About midnight the weather thickened over one star after another till all were gone. I went on deck. Here was a pretty clean sweep. Two of our port boats were gone, and I noticed (with a wicked clutch at the hand line along the deck-house) that there was no longer a port rail between me and the ocean. But I was determined on one point: that I would not soon again return to my coffin of a berth, with its stale smells, its impossible sudden dives and plunges, and its loathsome suggestions of cockroaches and worse. Clinging with all my might and caution to the hand line, and averting my eyes from the dizzyfying gap in the rail, I moved cautiously forward in the lee of the deck-house. When the Major Pickins rolled to starboard I lay, as it were, upon the side of the deck-house, as upon a slant of roof, but when she elevatored down, down to leeward, I could hardly keep a semblance of footing, and was left, to all intents and purposes, hanging by my hands alone. Now and then I could hear, following a thundering concussion forward, the sound of solid water mill-racing aft along the star-board deck, or, from deep within

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TWO BUNGLERS

the bowels of the ship, the retching groan of overstrained iron.

Presently I was aware of a man progressing slowly toward me, his face to the deck-house and his hands carefully overhauling the line. When we came close together I was still wondering how we were to pass each other safely, and the same thought must have been in his head, for, having met, we paused, side by side, for some moments, before attempting the manœuvre. Presently he turned his face toward me; it was wet with sea water; a shrewd, lively face, with a grey moustache and goatee.

"We're right off the Santee," he said, or shouted, for there was an infernal din going on, "that's why it's so rough. It will be smoother directly. I have been in the pilot-house talking with the captain. Now I am going down to see after my horse—a lovely

mare, sir."

"Will you pass outside or inside?"

I shouted; "whichever you say."

"As the older man," he said, his eyes twinkling, "I had better be the pivot, sir. Let us wait until our side of the vessel is about to be uppermost—now, sir—as we are rising—as we are rising."

I loosed my left hand and passed it around his back, and once more gripped

the line.

"So," said he, "keep her so until the next roll."



I waited then until the deck began once more to press against the soles of my feet; let go my right hand-and Heaven alone knows exactly what happened. I have thought, however, that as the ship was staggering up from the long roll to leeward, she was suddenly beaten down, and back—as a fighter, rising from a knockdown blow, gets to his knees and is once more felled by an adversary who has momentarily passed beyond the restraint of the rules. But I know that while my right hand was holding to nothing, the stranger's weight came suddenly full force against my chest, and tore loose the grip that I had of the line with my left hand that he turned and clutched me, and that, locked like a pair of dancers, we slipped and revolved in a kind of lugubrious waltzing, upright, without cry or comment, down the slant of slippery deck, through the long gash in the port rail, and into the sea. The heavy impact separated us, and I have never seen that cheery, twinkling face from that day to this, nor known who he was, nor who mourned for him.

II. THE HUNCHBACK

A TRAINED journalist will fall overboard (for pay) and describe you certain phases with such excellent judgment and selection as to give you a proper notion of the whole. I am not a trained journalist, and, furthermore, my chute came with unfair suddenness, and I did not enter the sea with a mind focussed to selection before description. What there was left of my mind was wholly taken up with the fact that the water was very much warmer than the air: and it must have been instinct, set to work by this, that started me stripping off my coat, and clutching, as I was rolled and tossed and smothered, after my bootlaces. Not for many seconds, I am sure, did it enter my head to look for the ship or to call for help. From the top of a wave to which I had made sudden and involuntary ascent I caught a glimpse of the Major Pickins' lights in the windward smother; and, as I shot downward from the eminence, a choice of cries struggled in my mouth. had an insane hesitation between "Help" and "Man overboard"; chose the former as the more piercing,

and, in the moment of uttering it, had my mouth filled to the brim with water,

and never cried out at all.

To get undressed obsessed me. And whenever I could draw two lungs full of air I let the sea have its will of me. the while I ripped at shoelaces and buttons, and kicked and twisted myself free of this and that. Being at length naked, and in no fear of becoming water-logged, I tried to think out a plan. But there was nothing to that. To breathe in well-chosen moments, and to keep afloat with the least possible exertion, destroyed all powers of inauguration. I could recollect, but I could not plan. It did not yet occur to me that the chance acquaintance with whom I had gone overboard might be in worse plight than I; might, as against a lifelong experience and delight in swimming, not have the learning to swim a stroke; might, as against entering the water without any strain, have been crippled from the very outset. It was fifteen or twenty minutes before I thought of these things, and by then I was more tired than I liked, and in no mood to pity another. Nor have I ever thought, perhaps, quite as I should about that sudden drowning of a cheerful man in the night. Perhaps I shall. It comes home to me the more as time passes.

I never reached the last throes of ex-

haustion, nor near them. I kept expecting to. But I was in splendid condition, after the long winter of hunting, and lawn tennis, and a youth full of contempt for spirits and tobacco; a good fortune, I must believe, rather than a desert.

It was easy enough to keep alive in the big seas, and they must have carried me swiftly shoreward; but the sensation was of being in mid-ocean, halfway between Charleston and Gibraltar. It was a growing regularity in the waves with which I swam that prompted me to think that I was nearing land, and presently I heard, far ahead, a thunderous booming, as of surf upon a beach. Had the undertow been at all commensurate with the rush and charge of the surf I must have bobbed about in the offing until strangled. But I have been more put to it to make a landing at Bailey's Beach in Newport through surf that hardly looked the name. You advance upon a wave, and, when that has escaped from under your clutch, you make a stout fight not to be sucked backward; the next wave advances you a little farther; you make a still stouter struggle, and so on. You must swim high, you must save a stroke whenever it is possible, and you must have swum strongly since childhood, and that is all there is to landing through surf-unless in the last shallows you get so rolled

and choked and battered that you lose all presence of mind and your last ves-

tige of strength.

I noted with the most dismal forebodings how cold the air was after the water. I was upon a stretch of hard, fine sand; of what extent, whether continent, island or seaward rock, I could not guess. And the gale blowing upon my wet and open-pored nakedness (for I must have sweated profusely in the long swim) froze me to the marrow. I made an effort to find shelter, crossing the upward slope of the beach, and then descending, but only to find my feet among sharp marsh grasses that stuck like bayonets from an oozy mud. The night was dark as pitch, and I dared not advance in that direction. Nothing was open for me then, till daylight, but the beach, and returning I commenced to run gingerly up and down, swinging my arms violently across my chest, like a New York cab-driver on a winter night.

Dawn came at last, showing upon the one hand a wild, white-maned sea, and upon the other, marsh and waterway, and waterway and marsh, and woody island and pond, and pond and woody island. And beneath my feet a splendid speedway, as it were, of white sand stretching illimitably north and south. Had I been an amphibian I must have thought myself upon the very boundar-

ies of my paradise, but I was a cold, naked man, heartily sick of the am

phibious parts of amphibianism.

The discordant cries of gulls rising by thousands from the marshes pierced the ear. Hundreds of shore birds, tired and discouraged by the storm, fed tamely in the shallow laps of water that ran up the beach after each thunderous bursting of a wave. The marsh at the back of the beach, into which I had inadvertently stepped during the night, was alive with myriads of fiddler-crabs, scuttling busily among the sharp, sparse grasses. I had never seen a region so full of life, nor so lonesome.

For want of a better offering I went south along the beach, only to find that it was by no means an illimitable highway, but was broken and crossed by little streams and rivulets of marsh water, and, within a mile, by a wide

river mouth.

One thing was of comfort. The loud voice of the wind, as if by some magic of the full tide about to turn, had fallen to a whisper; and here and there through the grey daybreak the sun had stabbed out a ray. In a hollow of sand I found three seagull eggs, fresh enough to swallow; and, with the fear upon me of all known and unknown fevers, I rinsed my parched mouth and throat with river water. Then I retraced my steps and passed a mile or so beyond my

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landing-place. The shore birds, thanks to the falling wind, and disturbed, no doubt, by me, began now to resume their northern migration, flying in little flocks from headland to headland of the beach, or in great flocks and in great swinging curves out over the still wildly-troubled sea. The tide, by now setting out, kept uncovering inch by inch the black, shellfishy feeding grounds of the gulls; and these fed, fought, piled upon each other, and screamed without decency or regard for the nearness of man.

The swamp on my left became wetter and wetter, until presently it was all water, and I stood at the beginning of a long, narrow lake, that had for its eastern side banks of reeds and river sand, and for its western, holding straight on like a fine causeway, the beach itself upon which I was stranded. The two shores of the lake seemed to merge half a mile away, but whether or not the beach itself extended any farther in that direction was guesswork. If not I was so badly shipwrecked that it was not pleasant to think about. What should I do for food when the gulls had finished the business of raising their young, and what in the meantime for pure water?

My body was no more bare of clothes than my mind of comfort, and while I stood, trying to make head against an

incipient rising of panic, I heard from the farther end of the lake two reports of a shotgun, very faint, but compact and distinct, and before I had even set out to run toward them they were followed by two more.

My case was not unlike that of the many-wiled Odysseus when he heard the voices of the girls at play; but unlike him I had no branch of a tree with which to cloak my unconventional advance. Yet I so wished to get to the owner of that shotgun, man, woman or child, before that owner got away from me, that I raced along the half-mile of beach in an unabashed delirium of hope and excitement. Twice more the shotgun reported, and I was soon near enough to see that there was an artistic flock of wooden curlew stuck into the beach, beyond the reach of the waves, and convenient to a blind built of driving sea-weeds and jetsam. My burst of speed being spent, I relapsed into a trot, and then walked. When I was within thirty yards of the blind, an oldish man, very much humped in the back and thin to emaciation, rose, hopped nimbly out, and advanced to meet meone hand held up, palm forward, with a kind of deprecating gesture.

"No hurry, sir—no hurry," he said. "Won't you walk into the blind, sir,

and rest yourself?"

He had a pleasant, chirping voice,

a clean-shaven skeleton of a face, at once humorous and bitterish.

"And now, sir," said he, when we had shaken hands and were seated in the blind, "don't say that you are a spontaneous creation of these beaches."

I told him my misadventure briefly. "Well, well," he said; "and are you

warm enough?

What with the running, and the sun now hotly shining, I was; but I apol-

ogised for my nakedness.

"I assure you," he said, "that to one of Attic proclivities you are welcome as you are. And a handsome figure you cut running down the beach! You have learned your running in a good school-Harvard-Yale?"

"Yale," I said.

"When you first appeared," he said, "I called to Coffee Pot. I said: 'Coffee Pot, there is a saying that naked, all men are equal. To disprove it, look There comes a university vonder. man!'"

The hunchback turned and spoke to a clump of reeds in a strange tongue. At once from the clump came, fawning and rubbing his hands, a black, formidably

big negro.

"This is Coffee Pot," said the hunch-"He once spilled a boiling pot of coffee upon Lord Nairn. Hence the name. It is one of derision, shame and ignominy. He smarts under it as un-

der a whip." He spoke again in the strange tongue, and the negro disappeared among the reeds.

"I have told him to make you a cup of coffee, sir," said the hunchback, "and to serve you with a little lunch. Since introductions are going "-he bowed, and laid a hand upon his narrow, peaked chest—"Sir Peter Moore," he said, "at your service."

"I am Richard Bourne," I said, "at

yours."

But I wondered how he could be a Sir-for he had no more of an Englishman's manner of speech or greeting than I myself; less, if anything. He had, you might say, an isolated effect, as if he had invented himself, his way of doing things, his way while saying things, and even his quality of voice. While coffee was brewing, Sir Peter asked me if I was an athlete in more ways than one.

"You are very huge, you know," he said, "and I have seen you run. Do

vou shoot?"

"A little," I said.

"Delightful!" he said. "I have an extra gun along-both are by Purdy, sir, of London." He passed me a beautiful weapon, which I handled and admired, and put to my shoulder.

"Well, sir," he said, "we are missing the shooting. There are shells. I came down because of the storm: for-

tunate for you, sir. There is always fine birding at this season, after a storm. Now, sir, if you are loaded we will keep down—"

But almost before the words were out of his mouth he had darted to his feet, and fired twice into a wisp of robinsnipe that had suddenly swung over the decoys. Three fell, head over heels. Sir Peter crouched and reloaded.

We had splendid shooting for an hour, during which Coffee Pot served us with a delicious breakfast of coffee, bacon, sandwiches, cold corn pone and strawberries.

"I keep thinking, Sir Peter," I said, "with immense gratitude, of the change made by you in my mental outlook. Being cast naked away was never my favourite pursuit, whereas I am free to admit that this is."

"The breakfast, sir-or the gun-

ning?" chirped Sir Peter.

"The two in combination," I said, and I asked him if he was on a trip, or if he lived in this part of the world; to which he gave me my own answer—
"the two in combination."

He explained, however, that he had a house very far back among the marshes; but that for a day or two he had slept in a tent, pitched on the nearest dry land.

"When we get to the tent, sir," he said, "you shall have a change of



"We had splendid shooting for an hour, during which Coffee Pot served us with a delicious breakfast"

clothes; and thus bring your pre-Adamite idvl to a close."

"And shall I be forced to lie down and sleep?" I asked, for drowsiness

was getting the better of me.

"I am inconsiderate—very," he said.
"You shall, sir. The cream of the shooting is over. We shall go at once."

He called to Coffee Pot in the strange tongue, and presently we had embarked in a pretty canvas canoe, hitherto hidden among the reeds, and were being driven by the negro's powerful strokes through a labyrinth of diminutive waterways, that spider-webbed it among the solids and semi-solids of the marshes.

"What language," I asked, "do you use when you talk to Coffee Pot?"

"The degenerate remnant of his original African, I suppose," said Sir Peter, "mixed with English unintelligible to an English-speaking person. Our coast negroes speak nothing else, and few of them understand anything else."

A little later, to make conversation and keep myself from falling asleep in the canoe, I remarked that Coffee Pot seemed to be a most efficient servant.

"What do you have to pay for your labour?" I asked.

Sir Peter thought for a moment.

"Mr. Bourne," he said, "I have come to certain conclusions in your case, which I have no doubt will be borne out

we feed our labourers; but we do not pay them. In our happy, inaccessible and amphibious little country we have never felt the necessity of giving up our slaves. Immediately after the incident from which he derives his name I purchased Coffee Pot from Lord Nairn. He is very well treated, very happy, very efficient, very ignorant. He does not even know that in certain parts of a benighted world other negroes are not slaves."

I did not take Sir Peter seriously. Who would? He was amusing himself at the expense of a naked and sleepy stranger; tempting me, as it were, to rise to a somewhat clumsily-baited hook. I refused to rise, and pretended to accept his statements as a matter of course. But another day was to startle me into knowing that Sir Peter had spoken the truth, and that strictly.

I fell asleep in the canoe. When Sir Peter waked me we were in a deeply-bushed cove; there was no view in any direction. I got out of the canoe, blinking and very groggy, and followed Sir Peter along a trail narrow like a deer run. It was very hot away from the ocean, and the bushes were already in dense summer leaf, shutting off the least breath of air. But we had not far to go. The bushes opened presently to right and left, and disclosed a small

space of white sand, level as a room floor, from the midst of which sprouted a very ancient, very stunted liveoak, hung with long beards of grey moss.

In the shade of the oak was a white tent, and the flaps looped back disclosed a neat canvas cot, made up like a bed, with a monogramed collar of white sheet turned down over the neck of the blankets.

"That is yours, sir," said Sir Peter,

"for the asking."

What if my head overlapped the cot at the one end and my feet at the other? I slept as I hope some day to sleep

again.

The only light when I awoke came through the open end of the tent from a lantern set in the sand. Sir Peter was crouching near it with his back to me, and seemed to be poking at something with a stick.

"Hello," I called.

"So you're awake!" he answered, but without turning. "Come out here. I've a fine moccasin; the first of the season. A little sluggish, sir, but full of fight."

I am afraid the hair stood up on my

head.

"Where are those clothes you promised me," I answered, "and especially those hip boots made of sheet steel, lined with rawhide?"

Sir Peter made a sudden dart with his hand; laughed, rose and turned,

holding by the throat a thick, writhing horror—the more horrible for the faint

light.

He held it so a moment for me to see, then turned and flung it far off into the night. I heard it land with a crash among the bushes. Sir Peter entered the tent.

"I am afraid you're too big for clothes, after all," he said. "But as there's nothing ahead but boat work I think that if we cut armholes in one blanket, and give you another to cover your bare arms, you'll make out. We sha'n't get to my house before two o'clock, I should say, and I can smuggle you up from the landing without the

ladies seeing you."

Then came supper, and afterward, interminable hours of waking and drowsing in the canoe, driven by Coffee Pot. We never followed one course for long. We were always turning, it seemed to me, a right-angle corner, and now, you knew rather than saw, so dark it was, we were out on open water with a faint breeze blowing over it, and now voyaging through tall, sighing reeds that rasped along the sides of the canoe, and now following some stagnant waterway that writhed about among the stems of trees. Once, in such a place, Sir Peter gave an order to Coffee Pot, who stopped paddling.

"Listen," said Sir Peter.

THE HUNCHBACK

I could hear abrupt, faint ripplings of water, cautious splashings, and within a foot of the canoe at my end a sudden swirling commotion as of a rising fish taking fright.

"The whole place seems alive," I

said, and was not happy.

"Moccasins mostly hereabouts," said Sir Peter. He spoke to Coffee Pot, and we went on.

"From April to Christmas," said Sir Peter, "we are very little troubled by trespassers in the Santee. But during the winter months, when the snakes and the alligators are hibernating, we sometimes have to stand upon our rights. The great menace to the peace and security of this country is your duck hunter. Where there are ducks he will come, backed, if necessary, by his government." Sir Peter spoke bitterly. "If I could invent the means," he said, "I would abolish the whole Atlantic flight of wild fowl."

So far as I could see we were still in the wildest of land and water wildernesses, when suddenly Coffee Pot ran the canoe alongside of a little float, and Sir Peter hopped nimbly out.

"Here we are, sir," he said. "This is Moore House Landing. You shall soon be snug in bed—in your own bed,

sir."

III. AN INDEPENDENT STATE

I WOKE in a great double bed of Domingo mahogany inlaid with brass. Through the blinds of three east windows sunlight streamed; and when I opened these it was to look down upon a brick-walled garden laid into walks edged with ancient box, that radiated from a centre piece of marble—an Italian well curb, I think. Half a dozen negroes were at work among the flowerbeds, raking, trimming and gathering flowers. Beyond the garden a screen of mighty liveoaks shut off any further view. The house in which I had passed the night was, like the garden walls, of old Scotch brick, laid with the ends showing, and trimmed with white marble. It was very low, very extensive, I could make out from my window; and a little porch opening on the garden, half-marble columns, half-yellow roses, was a dream of pleasure to the eye.

During my sleep some one had entered my room and laid out clothes, but they were too big, even for me, and I was told later that they belonged to Lord Nairn, who had loaned them until his tailor could better provide me.

AN INDEPENDENT STATE

You may think that by this time I had had enough water, but exploration disclosed a bathroom opening from the bedroom. It had been a cupboard, I suppose; but now it had its porcelain and nickel fittings, tub and shower, and a frieze of cool fishes in cool, green water, English by the look of it, and many rough, blue towels of great size and invitation. So I was a long time luxuriously bathing and dressing, and I had not finished before Sir Peter knocked on my door and came in to wish me good-morning.

"I did not disturb you with breakfast," he said, "but you must learn to ring the bells in my house, and if the servants do not understand what you say, they will, at least, gather something from your signs. Now, if you are

ready, we will go downstairs."

While I was having strawberries and eggs and corn pone and coffee, in a long dining-room of mahogany and Chinese porcelain, with no end of portraits, Sir

Peter gave me the news.

"I have sent the telegrams you wrote out last night," he said, "to apprise your family of your safety, but they will not actually go until to-morrow, as it is a real journey to the office. I breakfasted with Lord Nairn. He expressed himself as wishing to receive you to-morrow. I had wished to present you to-day. But he is an old man, some-

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thing of an original, and not to be hectored. He thought it best that you should first receive more information from me as to the nature of your surroundings, and the people among whom you have fallen.

"These explanations," he said, "will astonish you no little, and it is just possible that you will be somewhat alarmed at first. To us, of course, they are every-day matters, and have been for cen-

turies."

"Nothing but having this breakfast taken away before I am done with it will alarm me, Sir Peter," I said. "There are," said he, "hereabouts

"There are," said he, "hereabouts hundreds of thousands of such acres as you saw yesterday and passed through last night. Islands in swamps, swamps in islands; waterways in forests, forests where ought to be waterways; and rice, rice, rice, everywhere rice, and the main mouth of the Santee River and all the hundred other mouths. You might leave Moore Landing in a fast motor-boat, with only yourself to steer, and not get yourself out of this region in a month. Have you ever been in the labyrinth at Hampton Court?"

I said that I had.

"Well," said he, "the labyrinth in whose midst you now find yourself is a million times as big, and a million times more complicated. For instance, sir, if we desired, for some reason or

AN INDEPENDENT STATE

other, to keep a man prisoner among us we would have only to wish him goodday and let him go."

"Well, Sir Peter," said I, "I ambaving the time of my life. You won't

have to keep me prisoner."

"I am glad, sir," he said, rather gravely, "to hear you voice such an opinion."

Somehow I felt uncomfortable.

"It's curious," he said. "You could take me in one of your great blacksmith hands and break me into a thousand pieces—none of the servants would touch you, let us say—and still, here you'd be. It's a curious thought."

"Sir Peter," I said jocularly, "in spite of the breakfast you are rapidly

alarming me."

"Well, well, he said, "a man—even a hunchback—must do what he can for his—country. And," he said, "this is my country. Mr. Bourne, we differ in some policies from the States; we, for instance, only allow desirable immigrants to settle among us. We make them settle. As, for instance," he went on, "yesterday, when I saw that physique of yours coming down the beach as lightly as blown thistledown, I said to myself, 'There's a man we want.' And here you are."

Of course I thought that Sir Peter was just being jocular and complimentary, in spite of his gravity. Not a

thought of anything seriously intended against me had as yet entered my head. "I wish," said I, "that you would

tell me more about this country of

vours."

"Oh, I shall," he said; "I must. Lord Nairn said: 'Show him as many ropes as you can, Sir Peter, as soon as you may-your accounts of his appearance, of his running, of his shooting, delight me. Bring him to see me to-morrow.'"

"Who is Lord Nairn?" I asked.
"Vulgarly," said Sir Peter, "we speak of him as 'The Governor.' But he is in reality chairman of a committee of three who make our laws. Lady Wrenn is one member of this committee, and I have the honour to be another.

"Our little country," he continued, "is a logical growth. Such provisions as the Royal Governors made for our little territory in the old days never reached us at all. We were obliged then, as now, to be a law to ourselves. Some of our ancestors fought in your revolution against England, but purely as soldiers of fortune. The laws of the newly-made United States reached us, for good or ill, no more than had those of the Royal Governors. There was, therefore, no earthly use in our swearing fealty to such a government. We kept out. . . Later our sympa-

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thies were, of course, with the State of South Carolina when she seceded, and although many of our young men shed their blood for her, we, as a body politic, preserved a strict neutrality. Had Grant surrendered to Lee we would have been no more disturbed than we actually were by Lee's surrender to Grant. We would never have joined the Confederate States, we never acknowledge any sovereignty over us by the Union. In these marshes no government but our own has ever enforced a law. If, sir, I were caught setting fire to Lord Nairn's barn-which God forbid—who is to punish me? Unless my neighbours, no one. When Lincoln freed the slaves he only freed such slaves as he had the power to free. Ours were in no wise affected. They have never heard of a Civil War or of Lincoln.

"The United States—even in their most populous centres—are only able as yet to punish crime. They do not make so much as a beginning of preventing it. Indeed, sir, they have bitten off far more than they can chew this thousand years.

"I will give you an example. Suppose I were to discover a trespasser on my land. I order him off. He goes. In the United States, unless he were a smaller and a weaker man than I, which is unlikely, he would not go. The

Government would not put him off for me, nor make it terrible for him to trespass again. It is possible that the United States, by a supreme effort, unwilling, let us say, to let well enough alone, might reach us in the Santee, and destroy our property in slaves; but we who were scattered would return, reënslave the blacks, and resume our beneficent laws and customs."

Having finished breakfast Sir Peter led me into the garden, and, seating ourselves in an arbour of yellow roses,

he resumed his explanations.

"We belong to King George," he "But his laws could not, or would not, reach us in any way. We renounced him. Affiliated with South Carolina we renounced her. She could not take care of us. With the Northern Government we were never in any great sympathy. It did nothing for us. We renounced it; and continued, as we had begun, to govern ourselves. The situation has, of course, arisen from our isolation. Some day, like all small countries, we must go-some day the United States will see in this region a fit subject for drainage, for instance. Meanwhile "-Sir Peter smiled on me-" we are sufficient to ourselves."

"What you say astonishes me no end, Sir Peter," I said. "Do you mean to tell me that the National Government

has no jurisdiction here?"

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"Or does not choose to have," he said; "or does not know that there is any jurisdiction here to be had. Our flag floats boldly over Government House—but who is to see it but ourselves, and the buzzards, and the eagles? We are not in the public view, and we avoid publicity like all prudent men. The United States Government has never heard of us," he said, his voice rising; "isn't that enough reason for being the law to ourselves?"

"Do you," I asked, "call yourselves

a nation?"

"We have more humour," said Sir Peter drily; "we know that we are no more than a community of interest; a big secret society, if you like."

"Like the Night Riders?" I was so

foolish as to ask.

Sir Peter rose, turned his hump upon me, walked away whistling, and presently returned.

"I have mastered my evil passions," he said, and once more seated himself.

"And I have begged your pardon,"

I said.

"But," he said, "I am not sorry that you have mentioned the Night Riders. If they can exist, and be a law to themselves, within the very circle of your late Uncle Samuel's railroads, telegraphs, police, militia, and so on—if, I say, they can exist in all their black wickedness—who is to prevent us from

existing in prudence, and decency, and good will?"

"That's plausible," I said. "But why did you say my late Uncle Samuel? Has there been a cataclysm of which I

have not heard?"

"Among other things," said Sir Peter, "the first need of any government, however small, is self-preservation. We are not threatened by foreign or internal wars. But we are threatened by the immutable laws governing small and isolated populations. The problem confronting us with more and more gravity is new blood; not only in the upper classes, but among the poorer whites and the negroes. We are ever on the lookout to recruit these classes by new and desirable young men and women. And that," said he, "was why I was so heartily and patriotically rejoiced to see you come running down the beach."

It all seemed rather preposterous; but I was a little shaken by his instance of the Night Riders.

"I am to settle among you, and

marry?" I asked.
"If," said he stiffly, "on closer acquaintance we continue to find you worthy, sir."

"And if I prefer," said I, a little nettled by his tone, "to return to my

own people?"

"Mr. Bourne," he said, "I will lend

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you my canoe and Coffee Pot to paddle. I will instruct him to follow whatever course you may indicate by gesture. This he will do up to the limits of his own private knowledge of the region—beyond that you will have the consideration not to urge him—as you would both perish."

I began to feel pretty glum.

"There, there, my boy," said Sir Peter, "it's not so bad—try to interest yourself in us for a while—either the rest will come very easily—or not at all."

"In which case?" I said sharply.

"In which case," said Sir Peter, also sharply, "we are—as in all cases—the most secret society in the world."

"It seems to me," I said, "that you've been pretty free with some of your secrets, to me, a stranger."

His thin, skeleton face took on a very

bitter look.

"Either you will keep them, sir," he said, "or—"

"Or?" said I defiantly.

"Or the swamp will," said he.

I sat in troubled and angry silence.

Sir Peter rose.

"Lord Nairn's tailor," said he, "will be waiting to take your measure. Shall we go in?"

I rose and walked dumbly at his side. "See this Caroline Testout," said Sir Peter, and, with two fingers, he

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turned upward a half-open bud. "Is it not lovely?"

I made a proper, if unenthusiastic,

assent.

"It is not so lovely," said Sir Peter enigmatically, "as my niece—Mary Moore."

We strolled a little further toward

the house.

"My boy," said Sir Peter suddenly, "let me ask you to keep your bias and your determinations to yourself, whatever they may be, until you have been presented to all our young men, our elders, and their wives and daughters. Do you know Omar?"

And he quoted the lines:

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough, A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness— Ah, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

"And if a wilderness!" exclaimed Sir Peter cheerfully, "why not a swamp?"

IV. A PRISONER IN THE SANTEE

LADY MOORE was waiting for us in the hall. She was very tall and slim, with a high-bred, keen face and snow-white hair. She came forward in the prettiest way, stretching out both her hands, the colour flashing upward in her cheeks.

"You must forgive an old woman," she said, "for not greeting you sooner. I hope they gave you a good breakfast."

"You know they did," said I.

"Oh, we can't always get the best of everything," she said. "Are you to be taken to Lord Nairn to-day?"

"Not till to-morrow, I believe,"

said I.

"I am delighted," she said; "he will begin monopolising you. We must make the best of a whole day. I have asked some people to meet you at dinner—Lady Wrenn, Sir Brash Sterling, and some others."

"Mary?" asked Sir Peter.

"Oh, no," said she. "He must be polite to Lady Wrenn, and when Mary is in the room!" She shrugged her shoulders prettily. "Unfortunately for the rest of her sex," she said, "there is no one quite like Mary."

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"But," said I, "am I to dine in these spinnakers and balloon-jibs of Lord Nairn's?"

Lady Moore burst out laughing.

"I didn't like to laugh before," she said, "but since you have brought the matter up yourself——" and she laughed again.

"Lord Nairn," said Sir Peter solemnly, "is a very long way around the waist, and a very long way around everywhere else, and in every direction."

"I do wish," said Lady Moore, "that he would exercise and bant. Lady Nairn tells me that he no longer steps from his chair to his bed; he has had a new chair made which can be extended full length; so that all he has to do now is to roll."

"One of the heaviest men in the world, sir," said Sir Peter. "And when the notion takes him, which is not twice in six months, one of the most active. He can be a cat on his feet when he wants to."

"Meanwhile," said Lady Moore, "he is a sort of whale on its back; and his tailor is waiting in your room, Mr. Bourne, with samples. You will want quantities of white linen suits, for the weather will soon be far too hot. Our men wear nothing but linens in summer. Sir Peter"—she turned to her husband—"see that he has at least one suit ready for Mr. Bourne in an hour. Be-

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cause after lunch I am going to take Mr. Bourne in a canoe, shopping."

"Sir Peter," I said as we were going upstairs, "you will perhaps remember that when I arrived in this country my ready money was very low."

"And you, perhaps," said Sir Peter, do not remember that you are my

guest."

"He put the least little rising accent on the my. Not being as yet assured that I was his prisoner rather than his guest my heart was warmed by this, and I felt very grateful to him for expressing himself so kindly.

But I was delighted with the tailor -a tiny old negro, very black, with snow-white wool for hair, and immense gold-rimmed spectacles which he took off whenever he wanted to look at anything. He had no English whatever, only the uncouth, coast dialect that Coffee Pot spoke, and Sir Peter was obliged to act as interpreter between us.

I was ever an amateur of clothes among other things, but the old negro had but the one passion. And, as we turned over the beautiful samples of stuffs. Sir Peter himself became as feminine as we could wish. We had as much fun over my outfit as three schoolgirls over a trousseau. And I found myself ordering suits of white linen, and tan linen, and madras, and cream-coloured pongee, and shirts from beautiful wash

silks. I could not have pleased myself so well on Fifth Avenue, and I said so. Sir Peter chuckled. He had caught something of my enthusiasm for a certain brown linen, and had ordered a suit from the same piece for himself.

"Free trade, sir," he said, "free trade—the best article at the lowest price. All our goods come straight from Paris and London; we don't have to rig ourselves in the products of infant industries. For which, sir, I for one say, thank God."

The little tailor, who was beginning to take my measures, now discovered a hearty English word. "Glory!" he would say, "glory!" each time he read the verdict of the tape and recorded it by a system of knots in a string.

"He means that you are a very fine figure of a man to make clothes for, at

the price," chuckled Sir Peter.

The tailor had brought some workmen with him, and when the measuring and choosing were over he joined them in the laundry, and an hour later reappeared at my door with a white suit for me to try. It was not open to much criticism, and luncheon when announced found me, within reason, presentable.

At luncheon we were joined by Sir Peter's brother, Santee, and father of that Mary Moore who had by now not a little excited my interest. Mr. Santee Moore was in strong contrast to Sir

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Peter; being straight, Grecianly handsome, and silent, by comparison. The talk at luncheon was, I suppose purposely, political and local and full of information. The gentlemen discussed a venture due to arrive in the mouth of the Santee from England; the deplorable growth in activity of "our good neighbour the United States" in the revenue service; Lord Nairn's ingenious scheme for dealing with incurable drunkards.

"Who is it, Mr. Bourne," asked Sir Peter, "that opposes a man's drinking

himself to ruin?"

"His wife and children," I said.
"And why do they oppose him?"

"Well," I said, "among poor people I suppose what little money there is goes for drink. I suppose that's the

chief reason."

"What," said Sir Peter, "would be the attitude of mind of the most arrant teetotaller of a woman if her husband, instead of being obliged to pay for his drinks, received a bonus in cash for each one that he could force himself to swallow?"

"Some women, I am afraid," said I,

"would begin to favour drinking."

"Women," said Mr. Santee Moore, who had not spoken for some time, "are not good. They are greedy."

"So," said Sir Peter, "if there were a bonus placed upon drinking, a man's

wife and children would be soon using every vestige of influence they could bring to bear to make him drink."

"Some of them," said Mr. Santee Moore, "would hold him. The rest

would pour."

"The weak place," said Sir Peter, "is in defining what constitutes an incurable drunkard. If it weren't for that we would make the experiment. Perhaps we shall. Lord Nairn will have his way in the matter if he can. He claims that in two months all the incurable drunkards in the Santee would be dead. As for me," said Sir Peter, "I'm agreeable to the experiment, but Lady Wrenn is formidably opposed."

"Lady Wrenn," said Lady Moore, "is said to have an eye on the next elections. She will oppose Lord Nairn for

the chairmanship."

"It would be a mistake," said Sir Peter, "a fatal mistake, I think, to raise any woman so high. This, by the way, is among ourselves. An unofficial opinion for the benefit of trusted friends."

He included me in his quick glance, and I am afraid I was very much flattered. After lunch he drew me aside.

"You will wish to write to your mother," he said abruptly. "I suggest that you carry the letter when it is written to Lady Moore—to be edited. Write that you are staying with some

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Southern people named Moore—leave out the Sirs and the Ladys—say that you will visit them indefinitely. Tell her that she may address you in the care of Peter Moore, Esquire, Georgetown, South Carolina."

"Sir Peter," I said gravely, "all joking aside, am I to be kept here against my will? My correspondence

edited and all and all?"

"As to the correspondence," said Sir Peter, "vou would not write, inadvertently even, to injure those who intend you and have shown you nothing but kindness. As to your remaining against your will, I still have every hope that it will not be against your will. As to the rights and wrongs of the matter. Mr. Bourne, I think that if I had left vou on vonder ocean beach vou would be in a very sad plight. I ask you to regard your present situation with patience and with the open mind. If you wish to quarrel with me I shall be obliged to regard you as ungrateful-I perceive that Lady Moore has fetched her parasol. I fancy you have an engagement to go shopping with her."

THE shops in the Santee are not conveniently situated for shopping. Like all other evidences there of man's presence they are craftily scattered and hidden. You must go to the oaky heart of one island for your hats; to another island, by a canal through rice fields, for your haberdashery; to a sand acre among long-needle pine trees for quinine, tooth-brush, sponge, ammonia and your outfit against snake-bites. The rulers of the little country have arranged so well that only by a guide or by accident could you discover these dispensaries. They are managed by the poorer whites under supervision of the central committee of three; lazily, as is customary in hot countries, but honestly, I am told, and to the advantage of the many.

Lady Moore told me that she supposed there must be two thousand inhabitants, citizens and slaves, of this country within a country; but that only the slaves—that is, those belonging to the commonwealth who operate the rice plantations—live in communities. Three main islands are given up to them, where they grow a little corn and cotton and tobacco for themselves, and

whence they sally in boat-loads to work in the public fields. But all families not of slaves lived upon their own lands and waters, often at great distances from one another.

From the water, however, we saw but an occasional glimpse of houses. Trees have been encouraged to conceal those which must once have stood in plain sight; the old manor houses, of which there are half a dozen. And the newer houses have been built with a main view to concealment. There are no fine landings such as the rich people could afford—only a pile or two driven into the creek-side mud and a few floating planks. Visiting from one island to another is mostly by canoe, there being thousands of channels passable for these, whereas larger boats would lead to more or less congestion in the chief waterways and canals.

Twice we passed other canoes in the rice, very close, but we could only hear them. On the second occasion Lady Moore recognised a voice giving an order in "sea-coast." And she turned to me with a heightened colour and bright

eves. Then she called out:

"Good-evening!"

[(In the Santee they call the whole of the afternoon evening.) And a voice a little way off beyond the compact eight-foot screen of the rice reeds answered at once:

"Good-evening, Sylvia."

The voice was the coolest, freshest, youngest voice, with a little drawl to it, a little of golden bells, a little of laughter.

"Where are you going?"

"Home. Where are you going?"

"To the chemist." "Tust been there."

"Who's with you?"

The voice laughed before answering:

"That young Shirley!" We heard a

manlier chuckle.

I must suppose that the springs of jealousy within a man are ready to gush at the merest hint of a puncture, for the man's chuckle left me with an alertly quickened heart. I would have liked to blast the reeds between us and discover that he was lame and looked like a monkey. He sounded indolent and handsome and attractive.

"May I present Mr. Bourne?"

called Lady Moore.

"Of course you may." The voice had now a delightful friendliness mixed with mockery. "I'm charmed to meet you, Mr. Bourne."

"And I," said I, "am more than charmed to meet-Miss Moore."

had made my guess.

"Why!" cried Lady Moore. "I never mentioned your name to him, Mary."

"Then how did he guess? Did a

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rice-bird whisper my name in your ears, Mr. Bourne?" Oh, seductive voice!

"It was your voice," said I boldly. "There was never any mistaking that it was you."

Lady Moore burst out laughing.

"Hurry home, Mary," she said; "it looks to me as if the rice was catching fire."

The voice laughed, but unaccompan-

ied by the late manlier chuckle.

"Good-bye, Sylvia—good-bye, Mr. Bourne"—then a command in "seacoast," and I could hear the rice-stems rasping against her canoe and see the tops of the rice bending as before a sudden weight of air. We called our good-byes, and I said quietly to Lady Moore:

"If I stand up can I see her?"

"If you were nine feet high and she stood up in her canoe," said Lady Moore—"there goes a moccasin!"

I don't know if one went or not, but all thought of standing up in that or any other canoe vanished from my mind.

We did not speak for a hundred yards. Then Lady Moore said suddenly, but in an unconcerned voice:

"I do hope you'll learn to like us,

Mr Bourne."

"Where you are concerned, Lady Moore," I said, "it is no longer even guesswork. I love you."

Lady Moore laughed.

"If only Mary's voice came up to the rest of her," she said as one throwing a stone aimlessly into the water. I made no comment, and a few minutes later we had made a landing and were pursuing our way on foot toward the chemist's. It was a very pretty walk through liveoaks and then pines.

The chemist's was the only shop at which we found other customers. Here were two young ladies, very pretty, all in white, with white floppy hats and white parasols with which they poked the sand and turned over little stones while they chattered and waited for their purchases to be wrapped up. They were the sisters McMoultrie, after quinine and chloroform liniment. Granny had the shakes-wasn't it very early in the spring, Mr. Bourne, for the shakes? Brother had fallen off the varandah roof and sprained his wrist. They were beside themselves with excitement. Mr. Bourne, at meeting a brand-new man. They were really heartily tired of all the young men in the Santee. Yes, it was evident that I had been directly sent by Providence.

They had great dark eyes which they used from the cool shadows of their hats in the most outrageous and innocent manner. Had it not been for the voice in the rice, I must have succumbed



"Had it not been for the voice in the rice I must have succumbed then and there to one or both of them"

then and there to one or both of them. Lady Moore stood in the door of the shop greatly amused with us. The Misses McMoultrie sat upon the step, side by side, as like as two sweet peas, and played upon me from under their hats all the heavy artillery of their great, dark, innocent eyes. A vine of red roses thrust sharply out of the sand and was festooned over the door. And in the cool half-light within the shop I could see a glass showcase, great red and blue bottles with gilt labels, and a man all in white, who came and went languidly and announced every now and then that he was just looking for that ball of twine.

"Surely," I thought, "here is a strange picture for the heart of a swamp. Three lovely ladies, so simply dressed in white, and yet so smartly that you would pick them out in the crowd at Longchamps or Bailey's Beach; the well-appointed chemist's shop—logs without and all the best drugs within—and the rest but a patch of sand, a stand of pine, and rice and marsh, and swamp, and rice and snakes and alligators, and buzzards and herons and eagles—and no way out!"

We made our purchases and lingered a while in the lengthening shadows, and then the sisters McMoultrie, flashing among the pine-stems, went by one path

to their waiting canoe, and we by another to ours, and so back to Sir Peter's house—which stood very near the canal and of which you could see no vestige from the landing.

VI. JAILERS TO DINNER

LADY WRENN, Sir Brash Sterling, the Creightons (a young married couple), and Miss Creighton, the groom's sister, came to dinner. I had expected in Lady Wrenn a type of the new woman, which, as she herself remarked, is merely the old woman with no taste for apples; but I was agreeably surprised. She was a little creature, with a funny, little, brown face, and round, soft, golden-brown eyes, which, when she was listening, had the wistful, dreaming look of a chimpanzee, but which, when she was talking, hardened and sparkled as if studded with bits of broken glass. It was evident from the first that she enjoyed being sarcastic at the expense of others: but she did not hesitate, if she could make a point, to be equally direct and brutal with herself.

"Well," she said, when I had been presented (not informally, but with becoming ceremoniousness as to a personage), "you have seen two of the mighty ones, Mr. Bourne. Does it surprise you to find one of them a hunchback and one a sort of monkey?"

Sir Peter writhed a little and tried

unconsciously to straighten out his poor back.

"Don't," said she, seeing him, "you are straight enough inside Peter. A hunchback, a monkey and a leviathan," she went on. "I don't wonder that you are a little aghast at becoming one of us. But another generation will see handsome rulers. I don't think Sir Peter has any children, and I know I haven't. We must adopt Mr. Bourne between us, Sir Peter, and put him down in our wills. Then he'll stay willingly enough. What do you think, Brash—will money corrupt this loquacious young giant?" (I had not yet spoken a word.)

Sir Brash Sterling said that he thought sufficient money would corrupt any one. He was a burly, red-faced man, with a grey moustache so closely trimmed and so tightly curled into needle-points that it looked less like a growth of individual hair than a thing carved from a block. The hair of his head, too, cut very short in the English military regulation style, had, because of a hyacinthine tendency to curl, a look of solidity. His intonation was very English.

"I have, Mr. Bourne," said he, "ten children, of whom I am one. There isn't enough money for us all to be rich, so we take turns. It is my turn now."

"It always has been," said Lady Wrenn. "Many a time I've seen little

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Sterlings running barefoot through meadows knee-deep in snakes, while Sir Brash was re-silking and re-leathering his extremities five times a day."

She left us abruptly and marched straight across the room to the young Creightons, who managed at all oppor-

tunities to drift to one side.

"Come, come, Creightons," she said, "you have a stake in the community; come and hear Mr. Bourne lay down the law——"

But dinner was announced, and, except that Sir Peter gave his arm to Lady Wrenn, we entered the dining-room without ceremony. My seat was between Lady Wrenn and Miss Creighton; but it did not matter where anybody sat, as the only conversation possible was with Lady Wrenn. It was curious to watch her eyes, so hard and glinting when she spoke, so soft and monkey-like when she listened.

"By the way," said she, turning suddenly full upon me, "if you are counting on being presented to Lady Nairn tomorrow you will be disappointed."

"What has happened to poor

Amelia?" asked Lady Moore.

"I think," said Lady Wrenn, "that Amelia has about decided to give up."

I heard the girl on my right murmur as if she were thinking aloud, "poor little ghost," and I noticed that Sir Peter went whiter than ever in the face

and that his thin lips assumed their most bitterish look.

"Do you mean you think she is dying?" he asked slowly. Sir Brash Sterling cleared his throat nervously.

"I called early this morning," said Lady Wrenn. "Leviathan was sunning himself in the garden. I said: 'I have no time for you, Levi; where is Amelia? I have brought her some lacto-bacilline tablets.' He doesn't like me to call him Levi, and nobody else dares. 'Lady Nairn,' said he, 'has gone to her room.' 'What is the matter with her?' I asked. 'She was very pale,' he said. 'Has she seen the doctor?' I asked. But Leviathan only muttered something about anæmic and turned his chair by the wheels a little more away from me and a little more into the sun. So I left him in disgust and started for the house. Mary Moore was coming out. She had that brave, Atlantic-Ocean-ona-blue-day look of hers. And I knew that she had been greatly moved by something. That young Shirley was at the door waiting for her to come out, but she packed him off to wait for her at the landing. 'Lady Wrenn,' she said, 'do go up to Lady Nairn. I am going to talk to Lord Nairn about her. Is he in the garden?' 'My child,' I said, for by now that young Shirley was out of earshot, 'my dear child, it will not hurt you to see Lord Nairn; it

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would not hurt you to hobnob with Lucifer. But it would be better if Lord Nairn were never to see you again. It would be better if he never had seen you. My dear,' I said, 'I remember the first time he ever did see you, or just after-you were eight. I had business with him. I have forgotten what. He was in his garden. He had wheeled himself under a peach tree, from which he had had all the peaches but one pruned. Poor Lady Nairn, almost as white and sad as she is now, stood by him with one hand on the back of his chair. They were both looking at the one peach, he like a greedy, fat boy, and she was looking because he was.

"He must have recognised my step, for he never took his eyes from the peach. 'Letty,' said he, 'have you seen Santee Moore's young daughter?' 'Yes,' said I. 'I,' said he, his eyes always on the peach, 'am watching her ripen, Letty. I am watching her ripen.'"

"It seems to me," said Lady Moore, very critically for her, "that I would not have told that anecdote to Mary

Moore."

"You might as well try to poison the moon as Mary Moore. She did not even change colour. 'All the same,' she said, 'I think I must speak to him.' 'Well,' said I, 'God knows he will listen to you—but, Mary, he will listen

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only because of the sound of your voice and for the sake of looking at you.' So we parted at the door and I went up to Amelia. She was lying in her immense bed. She looked like a wilted morning-glory laid on the pillow. She didn't model the bedclothes much more than if she had been a sheet of paper.

"'Amelia,' I said, 'what is the matter with you?' Will you believe me, the poor creature burst into tears—the first I dare say she ever paid to an existence she must owe so many. And she said after a little, for she is too weak to cry long, 'Oh, Letty, he doesn't care that for me! I know it now. And now that I know I think he never cared very much. Perhaps it's because I have never had but the one child and was always mourning for her. But I won't stand in his way, Letty. And now you know what is the matter with me.' was very sharp with her, poor thing. I said. 'Did you tell this nonsense to Mary Moore?' And she said 'No,' and tried to turn her face away from me. 'Lord Nairn,' I said, 'is very much to blame for very many things; but, my dear, if the moth prefers the rose to the sweet little trailing arbutus, the arbutus may be unhappy about it, as she must, but she mustn't blame the rose.' 'Oh,' she said, 'Letty, who could be jealous of Mary Moore? She was with me just now. When she went

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I thought the sun had gone out of the room.' 'And then,' I said sharply, 'it got to be night and the dog star rose!' 'Letty,' she said, and reached for my hand, 'you are always fancying yourself slighted.' 'Well,' said I, 'Amelia, you mustn't take to your bed just because the world has come to an end.' I gossiped with her, told her about this famous Mr. Bourne who had arrived among us and whom I was dying to meet."

Lady Wrenn turned her snapping

eyes full upon me.

"She was interested," she said. "I told her that if you were as noble and good as you were reported big and strong we might arrange for you to—to tie the laces of Mary Moore's shoe—."

I felt myself the centre of all eyes. My heart thumped painfully and I blushed like a tomato. Were they considering me at headquarters, I wondered, as a possible suitor for—the Voice in the Rice? I was strangely depressed all in the moment. I could remember nothing of all my life but unworthy things—one after another. Fortunately for my discomposure Lady Wrenn switched her tongue back to Lady Moore.

"I gave her the lacto-bacilline tablets," she resumed, "and told her how and when to take them. She smiled

and asked me if they had the property of glue. I said 'Why?' She said 'Why?' and she laid her hand on her heart. 'Why, because it's all broken to pieces here.' And I think," concluded Lady Wrenn, blinking very rapidly, "that poor little Amelia has now almost the whole of her life to look back on."

Sir Brash Sterling cleared his throat and hawed, as Englishmen do when moved.

"Hope," said he, "she'll try to remember the days when the sun shone."

"This early spring," said Sir Peter gently, "when there was no flower out but the arbutus."

Lady Moore made a sound which in all gentleness and affection for that sweet and good woman I can only describe as an etherealised snuffle. The girl at my side answered like an echo. And I noticed that the Creightons, who had insisted on sitting next each other, raised their glasses as upon a signal, using their off hands.

"How," said Lady Wrenn almost brusquely and turning to me, "did you

like the McMoultrie girls?"

"I loved them at once," I said.

"A couple of rogues, those," said she.

VII. LAWN TENNIS

THE next morning, about ten o'clock, Lady Moore having promised, overnight, to follow, Sir Peter and I set out in a canoe paddled by the expert Coffee Pot, to call upon Lord Nairn. We stopped off for a few minutes at Mr. Santee Moore's house, but both he and his daughter (to my great disappointment) were out. There were a number of young ladies, including the sisters McMoultrie, gathered from afar and wide to play on Mr. Moore's lawntennis court (the best, I was told, in the whole region), and we sat for a while in the cool arbour among the spectators, exchanging compliments and news and chaffing any indiscretions (of which there were many) of the players. It seemed to me that the young ladies of the Santee, more especially the McMoultries, were all eyes that showered upon a man's defences all kinds of darts, those of mischief and mockery more especially; so that, had their mouths not also sent out unbroken streams of easy and pleasant small-talk, they must have occasioned great awkwardness. Sir Peter received and accepted on my account a great

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many invitations: to lawn-tennis parties, to luncheons, dinners, expeditions. Each young lady protested that she had received especial instructions from parents, grandparents or guardians to ask me to so and so and not to return home with "No" for an answer.

When we had said our good-byes and left the court some distance, we heard behind us a great burst of exclamations and greetings and laughter. Over my shoulder I saw that a tall, broad man in white had come up to the court from the other side through the oaks, and was being made much of. I could not see his face for the shadow of his broad hat.

"Who is that popular man?" I asked.

"That," said Sir Peter, who had also looked, "is that young Shirley. But the exclamations of joy are not so much a tribute to his person as to his sex. In the Santee the male sex is immensely popular." And he added drily—"Among the female sex."

"Tell me," I said, "what does a young man do in this part of the—in this country," I corrected, "for a career?"

"That young man," said Sir Peter, "does nothing but grow a little bigger and a little handsomer every year. As a child he aroused great expectations among his discerning elders." Sir

LAWN TENNIS

Peter's lip went very wry and bitterish. "And he has grown up, of course, the most disappointing of his generation. He is accomplished, clever enough, morally so-so, more charming personally than not, ornamental and perfectly worthless."

Sir Peter's words cheered me. I am

not able to state just why.

At the landing a very beautiful girl, dressed for tennis, was stepping out of a canoe. Her paddler, a short negro of great power, surly and taciturnlooking, backed his canoe and shot off in the rice. I was presented to Miss Stevens of the Heronry. She seemed to have less eyes than the rest, and to express herself with more sense and less banter. I could see that Sir Peter was fond of her and really listened when she spoke; though for young ladies, as a rule, he had very vague ears, but a very well-defined line of thought, mocking and deriding them to their faces quite maliciously, but without offence. He spared us, for instance, one of his usual introductions, which made all parties concerned, except himself, fidgety.

"Miss Stevens," he said very gravely, "this is Mr. Bourne. I'd like you to like each other, because I like you

both."

She looked at me with steady blue eyes, very much, I imagine, as Priscilla used to look at young men when they

were presented. And I remember I thought to myself, "that is the way Mary Moore would look at one, only not so much so."

We strolled part way back to the court with her, and it was arranged that she should take tea with Lady Moore that afternoon, and that, if I felt very strong and careful, I should take her canoeing in the cool.

Then, being a little late for our appointment with Lord Nairn, we hurried to the landing and embarked, Sir Peter muttering rather than remarking: "One of the few who make the whole race of man inferior to woman. One of the few."

"Sir Peter," I said, "I don't like one custom here. I suppose it's all right, but I don't like it."

"What?" he asked.

"The way you trust your negroes," I said. I was thinking of the surly, taciturn black who had managed Miss Stevens' canoe for her.

"There have been," said Sir Peter, "only two cases of what you refer to in my memory. For one thing, our negroes have always been slaves, they have never enjoyed that half-baked liberty through which the poor wretches of the States are passing; for another thing, our laws upon that subject are calculated to restrain any one but a maniac."

LAWN TENNIS

"What is the law here?" I asked. "A law," said Sir Peter peacefully, must be framed for the class or race who is to break it. For instance, shooting would have no terror for me-that is to say, no insurmountable terror; whereas hanging would. Now a negro, if convicted of the crime which we are discussing, is condemned to death; but he never knows at what moment he is to die, or where-or how. Nor would the other negroes know how, or when, or where. He would be taken into a certain building where the blinds are always closed, and not even his body or any fragments of it would ever be seen to come out. You see this form of punishment works upon the superstitious portion of the negro mind, and," said Sir Peter forcibly, "he dare not. But for the rest, the canoemen are not chosen at haphazard. They are a fine lot." He flung some words of "seacoast" back to Coffee Pot in the stern, and the latter burst into excited speech and laughter; even ceased paddling so as to slap his great thighs. "There you see," said Sir Peter; "I said, 'Is it true, Coffee Pot, that you are an unusually fine fellow?' And even your ignorance of our jargon cannot be deceived as to his answer. No," he concluded, "you don't get to be a canoeman hereabouts until you are a thoroughly fine fellow. That man of Miss

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Stevens'—Yap—would jump overboard among moccasins to rescue her hand-kerchief. They are all householders and family men."

"At once slaves and householders?"

I asked.

"We make it easy for our slaves to acquire and hold property," he said. "In many cases it amounts to freedom. And general prosperity is made to reflect upon the meanest of them. Food and clothing, with which their labours are rewarded, vary in quantity and quality exactly as the times are good or bad. Indeed I think ours is the prettiest example in the whole wide world of capital and labour living on polite and gracious terms."

"Still," said I, "they are slaves."

"Not if they don't know it," said Sir Peter. "Are you, my dear sir, a slave to some almighty power that made the world, or are you not?"

"I am not conscious that I am,"

said I.

"Nor I that I am," said Sir Peter.

"But maybe we are, sir. Don't I hear

a canoe off to the right?"

Some distance off upon some other canal through the rice a canoe was rasping along. I heard one word of "sea-coast" spoken, and my heart commenced to thump against my ribs.

"It's Miss Moore," I said.

Sir Peter gave me a puzzled look.

LAWN TENNIS

"How do you know?"

"I've heard her voice once before,"

I said. "There's no mistaking it."

"Well," said he, "we've no time to stop, even for greetings. As it is, Lord Nairn may be impatient with us."

"But," I said to myself, "at least that young Shirley is not in that canoe this time," and I caught myself hoping that Mr. Santee Moore, himself, was

his daughter's companion.

"I am mighty sorry," said Sir Peter presently, "that they were not at the house. But Mary Moore comes and goes, sir—she comes and goes."

LORD NAIRN

It had grown monstrously hot, for the sun was now at full blaze. But although there was here and there shade in Lord Nairn's garden, he himself, in his great pneumatic-tired wheel chair, was taking the sun in the corner made by the north and west walls-a place in which the hot waves ziddied and ed-

died like coal gas in a furnace.

If I had been led to expect a whale of a man I was disappointed. He was no bigger, I should say, than a hippopotamus-a paper-white, pink-cheeked man in that region of sunburn and tan. He did not wear a shade hat, but a golfing-cap upon the back of his great round head, with its pale yellow, silkfine, straight, thin hair. His face was the fat-featured face of a young baby emerged from the weazened wrinkles of the first few weeks of its life; but it was a baby's face as if seen through a magnifying glass. It was an enormous face. He looked very helpless in his chair, as if his ogress or giant or cyclops mother had deposited him therein while she ran to their mammoth cave to fetch his bottle. He had no hair upon his face, neither eyebrows nor lashes. His

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pale blue eyes never blinked; not even when he turned them full into the sun, petulantly, as if to say: "Put the blower on, can't you, and blaze up a little."

A thin blanket covered his legs and made a lap in which he had about a quarter bushel of fine peaches. Now and then he raised one of these to his mouth, disclosed an even set of tiny, milky teeth like those of a child of three, and bit off the sunny side; dropping what was left into the brickdust of the garden walk, where it became at once a red mass of ants.

To the eye there was something revolting about the man, something terrifying and something of unapproachable dignity. His voice had never "gone down," as they say at schools. It was like that of a very well-bred little boy of nine or ten years, very perfect in enunciation and clarity.

"I had thought by all accounts," said he, "to be presented with a bigger man. I had planned to get on my feet and measure heights with you for the supremacy. But you are only six feet two."

It was my heighth to an iota, but surprise that he had guessed so shrewdly must have shown in my face. For he said:

"Your face asks me how I know your exact height. I will tell you. I

know by a mark on the border the exact distance from your heels to where your shadow terminates at the exact corner of the walk. I know exactly the day of the year and the time of the day. From these data, sir, a baby could calculate your exact height. How tall do you think I am?"

"Seven feet," I said without hesita-

tion.

"No, sir," said he, "not by an inch. My legs are short in proportion to the rest of me. That is why I am only six feet eleven. Heights interest me immensely."

I wanted to discuss weights with him, but feared he might not like it. This, too, however, he read in my face as though that had been a transparency with a question printed across it.

"I should not have been offended," he said, "if you had asked my weight out loud. With my chair I weigh exactly quarter of a ton. But weights and hearts vary. Height is more constant. Do you believe in Hell?"

He took his chair by the wheels in his great, soft, white hands, twitched them in opposite directions and thus turned himself a little more into the sun.

"I have a creepy, chilly feeling," he said and repeated his question, to which I gave the usual answer of my generation.

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"Neither do I," said Lord Nairn.

"And a great pity," put in Sir Peter.
"I believe in it thoroughly—for others.
What earthly pleasure would there be in hating persons and being bullied by them if you didn't feel pretty sure that they would go to Hell when they died?"

"How I should sizzle," exclaimed Lord Nairn with some animation, "over a bed of really hot coals! But you believe in Heaven, Mr. Bourne?"

"Yes," I said.

"So do I," said he. "I believe in Heaven because I know there are angels." He raised a peach to his mouth and bit off the sunny side.

"Speaking of angels," said Sir Peter, "it is negligent of me not to have asked sooner after the state of Lady Nairn's health. Lady Wrenn informed us last night at dinner that she was suffering."

The pale eyes fixed themselves rigidly

upon Sir Peter.

"Did Lady Wrenn also inform you—and your guests—what Lady Nairn is suffering from? Did she?" And now the eyes looked rigidly into mine.

"Why," said Sir Peter hastily, "you know what a gossip the good little creature is. One takes her statements with salt, Lord Nairn—always with salt."

"And you, young sir," said Lord Nairn, "did you swallow Lady

Wrenn's accounts with salt?"

"I was affected by them," I said.

"Come, come, sir," he cried in his high-pitched voice, with a kind of sneering, domineering, bullying strain to it. "Aren't you man enough to speak frankly?"

My temper rose.

"I am man enough," I said, "and I hope gentleman enough to dispense with frankness when I consider its use might give pain or do an injustice."

He bit off the sunny side of a peach

and spat it instantly out.

"Not quite mellow," he explained mildly. And addressing me once more:

"You have not seen Mary Moore," he said. "When you have seen her, young sir, you will understand why in this world many a man is unkind in spite of himself-or rather, you will understand why many a man must be unkind hecause of himself. Nevertheless," he went on more shrilly, "I propose to see justice done-to others on whom I do it-to myself for whom I demand it. Thrice," he cried, "yesterday I denied Mary Moore as Peter denied Christ, that a sick and wretched woman might have the wish to live on a while. And as I denied by my words, so I was resolved to deny by all my acts." He descended the scale of his voice to its ordinary boyish pitch. "In consequence, gentlemen," he said, "Lady Nairn passed a comfortable

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night. This you may give out to all whom it may concern—old friends, new friends, old enemies, new enemies—as truth of gospel." His lips closed into a crimson cupid's bow.

"And," said Sir Peter, "how is

Lady Nairn to-day?"

"To-day," came the shrill boy voice,

"Lady Nairn is dead."

Stranger though I was, there was a something so sardonic and appalling in the manner of this announcement that I fell back a step as if I had been struck a blow.

Sir Peter made some lame remarks, a lame excuse or so, and we withdrew. As we turned to go Lord Nairn chose a peach from the pile in his lap and bit off the sunny side.

IX. A DRILL IN ANTI-VENOM

WE went directly from the garden to Lady Nairn's house, where we were to meet Lady Moore. Lady Wrenn was with her.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the latter, "here's Sir Peter, and my responsibilities end. A pretty time I've

had of it!"

Sir Peter, who was much agitated, told the ladies what Lord Nairn had said to us—about denying Mary Moore to give his wife ease. No one seemed to doubt the chairman's veracity in the least or that he would have kept his word if Lady Nairn had lived. But on the other hand, nobody doubted that, now his wife was dead, he would ride the horse of his passion with loose reins. Sir Peter suggested that it took two to make a wedding.

"Yes, yes," said Lady Wrenn, "and suppose he is able to persuade Mary Moore that it is her duty to marry him? You, Mr. Bourne, have perhaps wondered why Leviathan's power is so great among us. That is because you have never heard him persuade. When he persuades he ceases, as you may say,

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to put in an appearance, and you are only conscious of a disembodied force that pushes your mind along channels it never travelled in before."

"I am afraid," said I, "that on the whole Lord Nairn only revolted me."

"He has as many sides," said Lady Wrenn, "as he is inches around."

"Who was with Lady Nairn when

she died?" asked Sir Peter.

"She died in Mary Moore's arms," said his wife.

"Did Mary see Lord Nairn after-

ward?" he asked.

"She saw him just before," said Lady Moore. "She ran to the garden for him, and he wheeled as fast as he could, but was not in time."

"So," snapped Lady Wrenn, "he

went right back to the garden."

"This must have been just before

we arrived," said Sir Peter.

"Yes," said his wife; "I wonder you didn't meet Mary."

"We passed her," said Sir Peter,

"but on different channels."

"I tried to keep her till you arrived," said Lady Moore, "but she wouldn't wait."

"I think," said Lady Wrenn, "that she is afraid—if such a heart as hers

can know the feeling of fear."

"Oh," cried Sir Peter with great feeling, "why couldn't her life have been settled before this happened!"

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"Surely," I put in hotly, "she needn't fear that beast in the garden!"

This was followed by an ominous silence, and all eyes were turned to the hall door, which stood open at the level of the ground, its threshold bridged by two slightly-inclined planes to facilitate Lord Nairn's entrances and exits in his wheel-chair. But he did not appear, as every one, including myself, seemed to expect—I do not know why. Sir Peter turned to me.

"Nothing can be gained by calling

names," he said gently.
"Or by speaking the truth," said

Lady Wrenn.

"I have an idea," said Lady Moore, "that there is one man in the Santee who is not afraid of Lord Nairn."

"Let us thank God if that is so," said Sir Peter. "But," and he bowed to the ladies, "let me assure you that that man is not your humble and hunchbacked servant."

"Would you like to look at her,

Peter?" asked Lady Wrenn.

He bowed, and she led him to a closed door at the farther end of the hall. They disappeared into a room artificially lighted, though it was now high noon.

"Would you care to see her?" Lady

Moore asked gently.

"If there were any reason why I ought-" I said.

A DRILL IN ANTI-VENOM

"No reason, I think," she said. "It would not even be a lesson to you to be kind to your wife when you get one. She looks radiantly happy. To think," she went on, "that after twenty years of the most cruel sarcasm and neglect a man can make the woman who loves him happy by a word—by a begrudged word. Sir Peter will stay, probably, to arrange about the funeral with Lord Nairn and Lady Wrenn. We may as well go."

"Lady Moore," I said as we walked to the landing very slowly because of the heat, "if Miss Moore is so wonderfully attractive how is it that she has

not married?"

"Many have tried," she said, "and been found wanting. I suppose that when a girl has love in her heart for the whole of humanity it is a little harder for her to concentrate on any one man. I am sure that she is very, very sorry that she doesn't love any one. But who knows, Mr. Bourne—a big, strong man—a new face—"

"Lady Moore," I said, "may I tell

you a secret?"

She smiled.

"I have only heard Miss Moore's voice, her canoe rustling through the rice. I have never so much as seen her shadow. Once, when I was little, a circus came along and I was not allowed

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to go. But I felt that I must see it or die."

"What did you do?" asked Lady

Moore quite eagerly.

"I got as far as the tent," I said, "and heard the band playing and the people shouting and clapping their hands. And just as I was crawling under the canvas—just as Heaven was about to open before my eyes—my father caught me and took me home."

"But you didn't die," said Lady

Moore.

"No," I said seriously, "I didn't

quite die."

"I think," said Lady Moore, "that Heaven is more likely to open before your eyes here in the Santee."

"Oh!" I said.

"If not," said she, "why were you cast away on our front beach? Why are you big and strong and not afraid of Lord Nairn? Why did you arrive just in the very time when we needed a man? And why, Mr. Bourne, do you change colour whenever Mary Moore's name is mentioned?" She laughed. "I am going to call you Richard," she said.

When we were in the canoe and speeding away from the landing Lady Moore laughed to herself.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked.

"I was laughing," she said, "to think how many superior, educated

A DRILL IN ANTI-VENOM

people in the Santee agree with the most superstitious negroes about you."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed.

"The negroes say," she explained, "that you are not a man, but a beneficent witch-doctor. Coffee Pot, who saw the surf through which you claim to have swum, has reported that there was a whale in the offing who followed as you ran along the beach, keeping a loving and jealous watch until you were safe in Sir Peter's hands: that then the whale spouted as if with pleasure and relief and dove into the deeps. A witchdoctor is to the negroes what Hermes and Apollo and all those nice persons were to the Greeks."

"And do the upper classes think me a witch-doctor?" I asked plaintively.

"Well," she said, "they call you the Sea-God behind your back. And even if you aren't a god," she said, "they think you were directly sent by Heaven, which amounts to the same thing."

"Do you think I'm a god, Lady Moore?"

"I think," she said, "that a civilised man, travelling as you were, would at the very least have carried a toothbrush."

"And what," I said, "does Miss Moore think?"

"She," said Lady Moore, "whenever your name is mentioned-blushes."

A few minutes later I said:

"This channel has a familiar look. Am I wrong? Isn't that Mr. Santee Moore's landing in the cove? But of course it is. There's Miss Stevens' canoe come back for her; I know the man."

Going up the path to the house I had a nervous, empty feeling. So an inexperienced man must feel when he is about to make a speech or engage in his first battle or break into his first house in the dead of night. But that feeling yielded presently to one of languor and heaviness.

News of Lady Nairn's death had broken up the tennis party and sent the players home. Flowers were being brought into the house from the garden to be sent to Lord Nairn's, and Miss Stevens, her sleeves rolled up, was superintending and arranging. She told us that Miss Moore had gone away very hurriedly with that young Shirley, she supposed on business connected with the funeral; but it might be that some one was in trouble somewhere. While Miss Stevens talked she selected a rosebud and pinned it in my coat, settling it into position with a little tap—all in the most matter-of-fact way, as if her thoughts were far from her actions.

"By the way," she said, "I can't go canoeing this evening. I hope you're sorry. There is so much to be done. A mauve dress to be made for the funeral



44 At the landing a very beautiful girl, dressed for tennis, was stepping out of a canoe" (page 55)

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—black is taboo here—and father—with his gouty foot up in a chair—simply dying to hear all the details of everything. I need not explain, Mr. Bourne, that we are the most incessant gossipers in the whole world. You've noticed it. I think it must be in very bad taste; but we all like it, and I think it makes us seem human to each other and helps us to stand together and to be faithful. By the way, a child has been bitten by a moccasin over on Great Bear (this was one of the islands given over to a community of slaves)—the poor little thing died in half an hour."

"That's the first case this year," said Lady Moore. "Why can't people be more careful! Mr. Bourne," she turned upon me jocosely stern, "where is your

ligature?"

"In my left inside pocket," I said.

"Show it to me!"

I showed her the little tight roll of rubber bandage that she had bought for me at the chemist's. But she was not yet satisfied. And, Miss Stevens laughing gently all the while, and I tapping pocket after pocket, she fired off a string of interrogations: "Gauze?" "Scalpel?" "Hypodermic?" "Permanganate?" "Strychnine?"

"But," I pleaded, "I am almost portly as it is, and these wretched things bulge my pockets, and I am going to

leave them in my room."

"You are not," said Lady Moore.
"You are not to stir without them. I dare say you sea-gods understand the danger of shark-bites, but you don't know moccasins."

"Does the Sea-God," asked Miss Stevens practically, "know what to do with these things in case some one is

bitten?"

"Indeed I do," said I, "having sat up half the night and learned Ditmar's pamphlet from beginning to end. Lady Moore made me promise."

"Let's hear him," said Miss Stevens sceptically, looking up from the table of flowers which she had continued to

sort and arrange.

"First," I began nimbly, "apply-the-ligature - a-short-distance-above-the-bite. Thus-the-ligature - should-be-carried-in-a-pocket-that - is-immediately - available, without-a-second's-loss-in-a-fumble. Second. Enlarge-the-punctures-by-cutting-into-them, at-least-as-deep - as-they-are. Make - two-cuts-over-each, these - cuts crossing-each-other. This-cutting-starts-a-flow-of-the-poisoned-blood——"

"Don't," said Lady Moore, "it

makes me faint."

"I don't ask for any more," said Miss Stevens, "if he will only tell me the most important thing of all."

"That's too easy," I said. "'Keep-

your-head!'"

A DRILL IN ANTI-VENOM

Miss Stevens put down her flowers abruptly and shook hands with me.

"A man after my own heart," she said to Lady Moore.

But Lady Moore said:

"I won't have him bitten!"



X. BITTEN

LADY MOORE and I were alone for luncheon, and during the early afternoon, she being busy with a dressmaker and Sir Peter not having returned, I was thrown upon myself for company and amusement. Surely I was the most unguarded prisoner that ever fell among hospitable jailers. I wondered what would become of me if I provisioned a canoe and started off by myself in a general westerly direction. The thought gave me a wretched turn. From what I had already seen of that amphibious labyrinth I felt that to get out of it on his own ignorant guidance would be the lot of but one man out of many, many thousand. Waterways ended in swamps too solid to drive a canoe through, too wet to make a portage over; that would necessitate back-tracking and a détour, that another détour, and so on. thermore, there were water-floored forests to be crossed whose dense foliage hid the heavens and whose tree-trunks showed no influence of the season's weather as moss upon one side and none upon the other, so that a man must have a more artificial compass than any which

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BITTEN

Nature provides to progress for long in any given direction. Nevertheless, I was in no hurry to go—to escape seems too serious an expression. I would not remain indefinitely for any man: that much I promised myself. But for the present—well, had the way been open and the coast clear this once, and this once only, I must have stayed. I caught myself saying half aloud: "Not till I have seen Mary Moore—not till I have seen Mary Moore."

I wrote another letter to my mother, laid it on Lady Moore's writing-table to be edited, wandered about the ground-floor rooms, read at this book and that, and found that time was hanging heavily. About four o'clock Lady Moore discovered me nodding in the shady garden porch. I came to with a start

and leaped to my feet.

"I have looked everywhere for you," she said. "I am out of cold cream, and I thought it would amuse you, perhaps, to go to the chemist for me—would it?"

"Wouldn't I choose the opportunity

to escape?" I asked.

"No," she said, "you wouldn't. Is that what you have been planning all this time? Would it amuse you to go for me? You shall have my canoe and man."

I was really glad of something to do and said so. She got her parasol and walked to the landing, since I was in-

capable of naming my destination to the paddler in any language that he would understand. She saw me started and told me to be good.

"Do you remember what you are go-

ing for?" she called after me.

"Cold cream," I said.

"Mind you don't forget—a large jar. Charge it to Sir Peter."

"Won't you give me a little cash just

to have in my pocket?" I pleaded.

"Not a penny," she said. "Be off

with you!"

And the tall rice closed about the canoe and folded it, as it were, in a cool shadow.

The sisters McMoultrie were at the chemist's, inside the shop this time; and at sight of me each made haste to swallow something that she had in her mouth. The elder gagged and I burst out laughing.

"Gum?" I asked.

"No," cried the younger indignantly, "what do you take us for? They were bull's-eyes. You hold them in your mouth until they melt, and then you don't."

"Yours melted mighty sudden," I

said.

The elder McMoultrie put her hand to her throat and said dismally, "I wish mine would. Mine's stuck."

"You ladies appear to live here," I

said.



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But no. It was Granny as usual. Last time Granny had been out of quinine for the shakes; this time it was fever, and she was all out of phenacetin. They could never keep drugs in the house two minutes. Where drugs were concerned Granny was like a swarm of locusts out of the Bible, devouring everything. I should see their garden wall. It was a hundred years old, but it looked like new. Granny had licked all the phosphorus off the bricks. Grow simples in the garden? Well, one should rather think one tried. But to what end? 'As well turn the place full of goats and rabbits.

And so much talk at Granny's expense, and much eye-work at mine; so much so that when I finally departed with the cold cream I took a wrong path of many that centred in the clearing about the chemist's shop, and came presently to the water at a point from which no canoe was visible. One of my shoelaces had come untied, and as I bent over to tie it the case containing my scalpel hopped from its pocket and fell in the long grass beside the path. Without thinking I reached for it-something cold moved beneath my fingers, and a hideous, flaming pain pierced my wrist.

Very sick and cold I seated myself in the path and took out the rubber ligature and bound it very tightly above the

punctures. Then I searched with a stick for my scalpel and by God's grace was not long in finding it. The cutting was nothing, for the pain in my whole left arm was indescribable. I spoke once and said to myself: "Keep your head." Having slashed the punctures across and across and sucked and sucked the wounds, and forced them to bleed and bleed. I washed them in the creek; then filling a folding cup with creek water I dropped in crystals of permanganate of potash until the water was stained to the colour of dark-red wine, and washed and washed my wounds. Not till then did weakness and giddiness set in. I began to prepare a hypodermic of strychnine, but the trees on either side the path and the rice across the creek began to lean toward me-slowly at first, but with an accelerated motion like things falling until they had acquired great momentum—then, suddenly, they would be beginning all over from the beginning. But each time they seemed to fall it was a little more to the left and a little faster, until presently the effect was as of a circular movement faster and faster. Then everything stood still. Then very sedately the trees, the creek, the rice, the end of the path between the trees moved all the way around me as in a kind of solemn saraband. Just as they were completing a

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second revolution they vanished in a thundering shower of sparks.

I opened my eyes to pitch darkness. I was lying on my back. I could hear the rippling of water.

"Where am I?" I said.

There was never but the one voice in the world. It answered: "You are in my canoe. I am taking you home."

my canoe. I am taking you home."
"I cannot see you," I said. "Am I

blind?"

And the voice: "It's night."



XI. ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT

I MUST have fainted, for the next I knew Sir Peter was bending over me, his fingers on my pulse and a watch in his hand. Broad daylight streamed through the open windows of my own bedroom and the percolating air was of a morning freshness tinged with an odour of drugs. My limbs had a kind of numbness, not unpleasant, and my left arm tingled rather than pained; but no cat with but the one life left ever felt weaker.

"Pulse Napoleonic," said Sir Peter.

"Has been all night."

He let my hand drop limply on the bed-clothes, put away his watch and beamed. I had not yet seen his cadaverous face so youthful or so smiling.

"I wish to compliment you," he said, "on your presence of mind. But another time you must not cut so deep. If my niece had not found you you must have bled to death. Your ligature had come loose and you were pumping off enough blood to drive a turbine."

"Please—please," I said, "I want to thank Miss Moore for finding me and

for bringing me home."

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"Not necessary," said Sir Peter. "We've all thanked her till she's sick of gratitude. Besides, her procedure wasn't especially heroic. She was passing in her canoe—heard groans—landed —felt—knew that it was vou—struck one or two matches to see what was the matter—stopped the bleeding—struck the other match so's to have a good look at you—got her man to help roll you to the water—took one end of you—man at other-made a great effort of itstrained the muscles of her back so that she's stiff as a ramrod this morn-

ing. And here you are."

I told Sir Peter frankly how, embarrassed by the glances of the sisters Mc-Moultrie, I had taken the wrong path and come by my accident. He told me that the news of it had spread and was already bearing fruit in the most solicitous inquiries. Even Lord Nairn had sent to ask how I did. And from what I now know he must have been grieved to learn that I did so well. The venom. it seems, had not been given time to get into my circulation; and there was nothing for it but to lie by for a few days, keep my wounds clean and open. and take no risk of blood-poisoning. For to this punctures made even by serpents that are not poisonous are wonderfully susceptible.

"On the whole," said Sir Peter, "I think that to have been bitten by a moc-

casin is not the most unlucky thing that ever happened to you. You will get well in record time and——"

"And what?" I asked.

"Nothing," said Sir Peter. 'And presently, saying that we had chatted more than was good for me, he left the room whistling: "Hey! the rover; ho! the rover, will you go roving?" I learned later that he, together with Doctor Sumter, had watched all night by my bed, and that Lady Moore had come every fifteen minutes for bulletins, with which she had hurried off to the library where Mary Moore was waiting to hear.

And where were these ladies now? Faith, like sensible women, now that the patient's case was no longer dangerous nor perplexing, they had gone to bed, to sleep off the pet dissipation of their kind, even as man sleeps off the chosen orgies of his. And what is there, oh, ladies, more self-indulgent, more detrimental to health and looks, than to sit up the whole night through and pamper yourselves with bulletins, and with anxiety, and with pity, and with fear? Once during the day I got out of bed, contrary to Sir Peter's orders, and staggered to the escritoire in the corner, and wrote a little note and addressed it to the Blue Room, to be delivered when Miss Moore should wake. There he found me, fallen over upon the envel-

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ope while the ink was still wet-The Blue Room printed in reverse upon my left cheek. Such a scolding as I received! Not so violent as to excite me, nor vet so lenient as to leave even a remote hope of ultimate forgiveness. And furthermore, Miss Moore had wakened, greatly refreshed, and had gone home. Should Sir Peter take the note to Lady Moore as second string? She also had sat up all night, but I had not had the thought to write so much as "Boo" to her. No, she hadn't found me bleeding to death. If she had, being a sensible, experienced woman, she would have left me there. She knew well enough what those who cherished vipers in their bosoms must expect. A very searching scolding all around.

I was not allowed to leave my room for a week. During this three things happened. Lady Nairn was buried; and I received a letter from my mother, who had moved to our place in the country. Among other things, she wrote:

Short of malaria stay where you are. You are fallen among pleasant people and civilised. Here, forty miles from New York, the barnburnings of last winter are being continued.

Three people have seen the firebug at work, but will not bear witness lest their own barns go when he comes out of jail.

The country is lovely; hosts of spring

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flowers, and now and then a drunken man in a ditch. It is always a pleasure to me to see my neighbours so drunk that they cannot move. They are then less potent for evil, and one knows that their heads will be painful. . What a blessing it is that the town went no license at the last election. The tulip tree of which we are so fond has been taken during the winter for firewood by neighbour Blum. There is one log of it left in his front vard—the section containing the hollow where the little screech owl nested. But I have not as yet been able to speak my mind to him, as when he is half drunk he understands nothing but his native German, and when he is wholly drunk he is insensible. I can see him now, from my window, in his river-field. He has planted it to corn this year, and lies as a rule just under the scarecrow. . . . Dog has been poisoned. I had the Vet examine him, and he said that his stomach looked like a fragment of Brussels lace. . . . Poor Dog. Anybody can fish in our brook now, and everybody does. Fortunately it contains no fish. To be serious, my son, there is no law. order or decency—at any rate in our section within forty miles of City Hall. Why did your great-grandfather leave his country? Because conditions became impossible. We look upon him as a very noble, righteous, puritanical sort of hero. But what do we say of persons who leave this country because the conditions are impossible. We say traitor, faintheart, pole-cat. As a matter of fact, we are all descended from people who fled from the intolerable. Why more of us haven't inherited the sense to do likewise I don't know. But then I have no vote. I will send you the

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copy of the Man without a Country the next time I go to town. Mr. Blum got up just now, moved to the shady side of the scarecrow and lay down again. If you went to England to live Mr. Blum would say that you were a traitor.

Now the third thing which happened that week was this:

I was lying upon my back, just like Mr. Blum, but for a different reason. I had read a whole book through, a novel dealing with New York society, and I was determined to sleep it off at once. I was dozing probably—and then waked widely. There were two voices in the garden. I leaped to the window and looked out through the shutters, but the voices came from close to the house wall to the left. Very cautiously I pushed the shutters open and thrust my head out inch by inch. My heart thumped like a trunk falling downstairs. But the owners of the voices were under the little porch, hidden by the sheets of yellow roses, and as I must have caught the gist of what was being said had I staved longer it seemed necessary to close the shutters and go back to bed.

Presently the voices went into the house.

XII. A PRETTY TALK WITH LORD NAIRN

I was no sooner dressed and about than I was desired to wait upon Lord Nairn. He wished to see me alone, and neither Sir Peter nor his wife could give a reason for it. "We shall not know what he wants with you," Sir Peter said, "until you come back and tell us. And at that he may bind you not to tell."

"He will bind me to nothing to which I do not wish to be bound," I said. "I will make you that promise."

Lord Nairn was in his garden in the hottest corner. He was in mauve linen

from head to foot.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Bourne," he said, "to say that I am strongly against detaining persons among us against their will. You will by now in all probability be impatient of restraint and wish to go back to your own country."

"I am not conscious of any restraint,"

I said.

"That is not sense," said Lord Nairn. "To a man of character and vigour the fact that he does not even know his own way home must seem an

A TALK WITH LORD NAIRN

impugnment of his personal liberty. If no one guides you out of Santee—then

in Santee you live and die."

"And what is Santee," said I, bearing my mother's epistle in mind, "but an integral part of my own country—more lawless than other parts according to the Constitution and its amendments, but an integral part none the less, no matter what itself may have to say on the subject."

Lord Nairn rolled his round eyes full into the sun and looked bored.

"Just because you are very successful smugglers and are able for a time to make negroes work for you without paying them wages doesn't constitute you an independent people," I said. "You have broken the law longer with impunity, that is all."

"Is this the tone," piped Lord Nairn, that you adopt in your conversations

with Sir Peter?"

"No," said I. "If Sir Peter sent for me I should go to him as I have come to you, and he would offer me a chair."

"Pirate that he is," commented Lord

Nairn.

"He is the kindliest and best-mannered lawbreaker that I know," said I, "with the possible exception of one or two magnates in New York."

"I am sorry," said Lord Nairn, without taking his eyes from the sun, "that

I have no chair here to offer you." His tone was of a sudden exceedingly courteous. "Let us go to the house."

He set his chair in motion and wheeled himself rapidly along the path out of the garden and on to a long, brick-floored porch, all in full sunlight, that extended the length of the southeast front. He gave me a chair and offered refreshments which I declined.

"And so, sir," said he, "you feel at

home among us."

"Absolutely," said I.

"And yet," said he, "your place is not here. You are not so quixotic, I suppose, as to imagine that by staying you could one day redress our lawlessness, free the negroes like another Lincoln, put an end to our habit of free trade, and bring us of our own acknowledgment under the Stars and Stripes? No, sir. The moccasin flag will fly from Government House for many a generation yet."

"I have noted," I said, "that it flies within a circle of very tall trees so that it is a matter of real difficulty to get a

sight of it."

Leviathan broke into a peal of shrill,

boyish laughter.

"I am liking you better, Bourne," he said presently. "How is your bite?"

"Entirely healed, thank you." And I showed him my scars.

A TALK WITH LORD NAIRN

"The lucky thing," said Lord Nairn, "is that in nine hundred and ninetynine million cases out of the ten, a man is bitten on the arm or leg. It is then possible, as it was in your case, to stop the spread of the poison by a tight ligature. But if a man were punctured in the face he would die inevitably and very horribly—very." He laughed again. "No," he said, "I am wrong, and for the first time in—I cannot remember how long. You could stop the spread of the poison with the utmost ease. I will patent the method."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Why," said Lord Nairn, "you take the man who has been bitten in the face and hang him to the nearest tree."

"Well," I said, smiling, "if you ever happen to be so bitten, Lord Nairn, I hope that I may be on hand to do the

needful for you."

"I," said he, "am immune. I have experimented upon myself with snake-venom since my teens, beginning with the merest filtration—a shadow of the stuff—and increasing the dose as I was able to bear it. I had the idea of what's-his-name—the old heathen."

He rolled up his sleeve and showed me upon his enormous, hairless, white forearm countless scars of snake-bites. But in no case had one been cut across to let out the poison. I was, naturally, immensely interested.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

"It seems to me altogether marvel-

lous," I said. "Beyond belief."

He showed me his other arm, and there, livid and deep among hosts of old scars, were two fresh punctures.

"I got out of my chair this morning,"

said he, "to get those."

Between interest and horror I had

nothing to say.

"Did you suppose that my immense length was merely a freak of Nature?" he asked. "The men of my family were all small. That has been one effect of the poison. Another is my passion for the sun; my ability to look it in the face, the fact that I never visibly perspire. The pleasure I take, growing more and more with the years, of remaining motionless for hours. And that, I fancy, more than the venom, has to do with my enormous girth."

"Well," said I, "to be frank, I think yours the most horrid habit I ever

heard of."

"You are right to call it a habit," said he. "Like all habits it will one day get the better of its victim." He was silent for some moments. And then the shrill, boyish voice—startling after any period of silence:

"What are your sensations on seeing

a snake?"

"Nausea," I said promptly.

"Mine," said he, "are the opposite

A TALK WITH LORD NAIRN

—hunger. That is what I fear, Bourne. I will confess to you, not for publication, that once or twice I have had the thought: 'What would be the sensation of swallowing a living snake by the tail?'"

I pushed my chair back from him so that its feet squeaked sharply on the bricks.

"For God's sake, Lord Nairn," I

said, "change the subject."

His eyes darted here and there in the shrubbery and the muscles of his cheeks twitched and rippled under the fat in a curious manner. He gave himself a shake and resumed his usual pose of indolent immobility.

"So," said he, "you don't want to

leave us yet?"

"Not yet," I said.

"That is most agreeable of you," said he. "When you are ready to go, tell me. I sent for you to say that the road is open."

"And what of the tales that I would feel in duty bound to tell of the San-

tee?" I asked.

"Tell them," he said.
"Do you mean it?"

"I have thought much upon that head," said he, "and I have concluded that your Government, far from arising in its wrath and descending upon us, would not believe a word you said, and, if you protested, would most likely ap-

point a commission in lunacy to sit upon your case."

And I went away with an absolute conviction of the truth of Lord Nairn's conclusions. My Government surely, my friends unquestionably, and my mother probably, would put me down for an incorrigible liar. I told Sir Peter the whole of the conversation. He said it was true about the snakes. But why Lord Nairn so evidently wished me to leave the Santee was no plainer to him than it was to me. But to Lady Moore, when we told her, it was plain as day.

"He is very subtle in many ways," she said, "and he has had an intuition!"

"And what is this one this time?"

mocked Sir Peter.

"It is this," she said. "He has concluded that not any of us, but Richard here alone, may perhaps stand between him and Mary Moore. Tell me this, Richard," she said, "doesn't she attract you immensely already?"

"You forget," my lips said, "that

I have never seen her."

But my expression must have uttered something more committal. For Lady Moore looked at me, and reached up her hands and laid them on my shoulders, and looked, and said:

"Why-Richard!"

Sir Peter left us hastily, whistling.

XIII. CHALLENGED

 ${f W}$ HAT more to me was she whom ${f I}$ loved than a voice? Have you ever been offered shares in a gold mine by an able talker, your imagination working and building upon the promoter's glittering statements until you have fancied yourself into a house upon the Avenue at the very least, roses in all the rooms and an Italian car at the curb, purring? Had they talked me into this love of mine? Was I so simple, so impressionable? Or was the voice alone to blame? If I met her face to face and she did not speak, should I know her? Yes. I should know her here in the Santee. There could be no doubt about that. Yes, I should know her anywhere; were the meeting deferred to another country where I thought she could not be, still if we met I should know her. Who would not know at a glance the most beautiful, the most ravishing, the most rare?

But if you doubt that a man could fall in love before so slight an impetus, know that I, to whom the writing of a letter was as the pulling of a tooth, now took to myself pens and paper and

burned candles into the night. I have that mass of writing still, but I will spare you those verses, sonnets and lovesongs of which itself is by no means sparing. Here are excerpts:

When they speak of Leviathan or Shirley I feel as if I were entering a cold, damp cellar. When they speak of Mary Moore then I am coming out into the sun. When they couple her name with either of theirs the green and blue world turns red. I have met Shirley and played tennis with him. He is a long, big creature, very handsome. He was pinkly courteous to me, but I beat him. Janie McMoultrie says that he has been in love with Mary Moore all his lazy life, and that she is so kind to him because he has been so faithful. Faithful, pooh! say I; for the young men have other stories anent his faithfulness. Like many here-for these people trust each other wondrously to keep secrets—he has made the Grand Tour. They still use that old expression. All the capitals of Europe have smiled upon Shirley and his handsome face and his long purse. Alas, he has a long purse. What have I to offer? But she doesn't care about purses, full or flabby.

Lord Nairn has again suggested in the most courteous way that I leave the



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country. He fears that, unaccustomed to the climate, I shall take the malaria. What do I care? I will stay till this semi-tropics freezes over, if she stays. If she tells me to go I will not go unless she will go with me. I have just told the mirror over the dressing-table that I love her. I selected the mirror because it is in the shape of a heart. I love the mirrors in this house. have all reflected her loveliness. was here so much when she was little. This room of mine was hers. Here she had the measles, and here she had the diphtheria that time she nearly died. In vonder basin she has scrubbed her dolls, I dare say, till the paint came off. By vonder great bed she has knelt to say her charming prayers.

Why have I not seen her? I think there is a wicked power at work to prevent! I scent plots. I smell conspiracies! Truth will out. She has had a cold. Trojan Helen has one every spring. Yes, she did. You believe me? I thank you. And if the most beautiful of antiquity, why not the most beautiful of all time? Bless her, oh God, during and between sneezes. She had a little fever with the cold, but that is over. She will be about in a day or so.

We serenaded her last night. Nellie and Janie McMoultrie, Joan Stevens,

Harry McMoultrie, Shirley and I-met by appointment in the garden under her window. The window was wide open, but there was no light in the room. Janie tiptoed to Mr. Santee Moore's study and asked him if Mary was awake. Yes, she was awake. Lord, how dark it was! Shirley fell over a box bush and almost gave us away. We did not want her to know that we were there until we burst suddenly into song. We had practised in the afternoon. Janie returning from the study ran plunk into me-and giggled. Almost another give-We gathered close together. Joan Stevens, who is calmer than most in moments of supreme excitement, gave us the key in a whispered hum. And, a little raggedly in getting started, but pretty well together and with a fine, brisk rhythm (though I say it as am one of those that shouldn't), we burst clamorously upon the night with:

> Gaily the troubadour Touched his guitar, As he was hastening Home from the war.

And more slowly, and in my case with very genuine yearning:

> Singing from Palestine Hither I come; Lady-love, lady-love, We-elcome me home.

CHALLENGED

And so on. Would she come to the window, I wondered. Could the eye be made to pierce the darkness between? Almost I hoped she would not come. I wanted to see her with all my heart and soul, but not, oh, not to have my very first sight merely as among those present.

But she didn't come to the window. She spoke to us from deep within the room. She said she was lying downtoo comfortable and happy to move. Happy? What had she then to be so happy about? I didn't want her to be so happy all by herself. Oh, she said, our voices sounded heavenly. The night was young, ever so young. Sing on, nightingales. So we sang on and on and ran out of practised channels into deeps and shallows among which was much floundering and oh-ohing and laughter. Then, for it was growing late, they pushed Shirley and me forward-well under the window. And we sang, side by side, detesting each other very cordially:

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the moon is shining bright.
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me, who knows how,
To thy chamber window, sweet.

And when that was over, once more [99]

all together we sang that stately old chanty:

Farewell and adieu to you all, Spanish ladies; Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain.

And then we were for departing—when the voice came from above:

"Troubadours all," she called gaily,
"I am about to fling you a rose, having

no moneys by me."

Shirley and I edged forward a little, jealously. Silence. Then a sound as of a soft thing hitting a pane of glass and a note of golden laughter and the voice:

"I'll try another."

We heard it fall at our feet. We scrambled for it. Shirley threw himself roughly against me. I lost my temper and flung him away as I might an old glove. He came rushing back, mad as a hatter. But I had the rose. He whispered in my ear: "You'll hear from this."

Gentlemen and ladies, I have been challenged. I am to fight a duel. You understand? I thank you. That is how I feel about it. Very flippant.

We parted at the landing, each in his or her canoe—a shadow on the waters—a rippling—a rustling this way—a rasping that—vanishment—voices growing fainter and fainter.

XIV. TRAGIC END OF A FARCE

IT surprised me to learn that the custom of the duello survived among a people in many ways enlightened. For, having received a formal challenge from Mr. Shirley, who named Lord Nairn as his second (though the challenge was brought by a proxy), I carried it at once to Sir Peter with the request to act for me. He said that Shirlev and I must inevitably have fallen out and he treated the matter with his usual banter and levity. And though I was pleased enough, I am afraid, to fight Shirley, I thought, nevertheless, that Sir Peter showed mighty little concern where a life, perhaps, was at stake. But when I said something about the choice of weapons he laughed out loud.

"My dear Richard," he said, "we don't fight with weapons in the Santee. Our population couldn't stand it."

"Fists?" I suggested hopefully.

"Nonsense," said Sir Peter. "The object of the duello is not to show which of two hot-headed men is the stronger or the more fatal, but to furnish each with an honest chance to obtain satisfaction from the other. If Shirley fights you with his fists what honest or earthly

chance has he of obtaining satisfaction? None."

"What is the custom then, Sir

"It is very simple," he said. "The two adversaries face each other. A third party, chosen by the second, is provided with a stop-watch. At the word 'Now' he starts his watch going, while the contestants try to guess when a minute has passed. The one whose guess is nearest is then permitted to strike his adversary an open-handed blow upon the face—the recipient of the blow to stand motionless during its delivery, and afterward if he can. The guessing is then resumed until seven slaps have been exchanged."

I was mightily tickled with this no-

tion for settling disputes.

"But," I said, "it's too easy, Sir Peter. My pulse is as regular as a clock. I have only to keep tab of its

beats to——"

"We bar that," said Sir Peter. "Now suppose we send word to Lord Nairn that we will be at his house this evening at sharp five. He will have his principal there. And you two youngsters may each hope to box the other's ear all the seven times. Have you ever guessed minutes? No? I advise you to practise. It's not easy. Lucky you're not fighting Lord Nairn. He can tell them to the second."

TRAGIC END OF A FARCE

Sir Peter pulled out his watch and gave it to me.

"Carry that into the garden," he said, "and coach yourself."

In the midst of Lord Nairn's garden is an open rectangle made by a closelycropped hedge of Amor River privet. And here the belligerents met and saluted one another very coolly. Lord Nairn was in that corner of the place which the sinking sun still warmed, and I noted with some surprise that his choice for timekeeper-for we had left that detail wholly to him-was Mr. Santee Moore. Considering that at the root our quarrel was about the latter's daughter the arrangement struck me as in bad taste. Having conferred a moment with Lord Nairn, Sir Peter directed Mr. Shirley and myself to our places near the centre of the open space. not without a show of dignity and ceremony. Mr. Santee Moore then requested us to remove our hats.

I think Shirley must have made a mistake in removing his hat with his right hand. He must have intended to use his left. Anyway, he lifted his right to his hat and I saw in the palm of it a small square of surgeon's plaster. My first thought was that he had had a hurt. and (for I knew him to be righthanded) that he was showing good sportsmanship in fighting (if you may

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call it that) before it was well. But my next thought or intuition (it was more that) was a better one, as events proved. I had no reason to suspect treachery, but I did. Suppose, however, I asked to see the plaster and it should prove to be nothing but plaster; I should look all kinds of a suspicious fool. I knew that I must keep silence at whatever cost. False pride, man's natural love of dignity, made that demand. I must be wrong. And yet I could have sworn that something in the centre of that square of plaster, some minute particle of bright matter, as a crumb of glass, had for one instant refracted the light.

Furthermore, considering that here was a mere matter of a slap or so in the face, my adversary looked monstrous nervous. Under his clear, brown tan he was the colour of cigar ash. But when he found that my eyes were steadily upon his right hand, which hung half closed with its back to me, the ash colour was wiped out by an upward rush

of crimson.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Santee Moore. We bowed.

"Now!" said he, and clicked the lever of his watch.

Now a minute is a very long period of time, as I had learned of Sir Peter's timepiece. And I was determined not to speak until after Shirley, even if my



"He looked very helpless in his chair, as if his ogress or giant or cyclops mother had deposited him therein while she ran to their mammoth cave to fetch his bottle" (bage 60)

TRAGIC END OF A FARCE

judgment claimed that an hour had passed. I knew Shirley to be impetuous, hot-headed and rash. If either of us was to guess short it would be he. But he waited—and I waited. And I began to think that he knew what he was about. Surely, I thought, it is a minute now, surely. Suddenly:

"Time!" said Shirley.

Mr. Santee Moore looked at his watch, but did not change expression. A moment later:

"Time!" said I.

Mr. Santee Moore smiled.

"Sharp work," he said, "gentlemen. Mr. Shirley's guess is short of the minute by forty-five seconds; Mr. Bourne's

by forty-four-call it."

So it was my first turn. Shirley stood motionless, but by no means happy. And I struck him open-handed over his lower left cheek and jaw with all my might and main. He went to the ground as if he had fallen all the way from the clouds—his hands open, his fingers wide apart like star-fish.

Lord Nairn smothered an oath and wheeled rapidly toward him. But I had already knelt and taken his right

hand in mine.

"Look, gentlemen," I said, "and for the honour of your Santee be glad that the first turn was mine." In full sight of all I ripped the plaster from Shirley's hand and gave it to Sir Peter.

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"Be careful," I said.

Through the plaster, so that the point must have pierced my cheek, was thrust a brass-headed thumb-tack such as draftsmen use to pin a sheet of paper to a drawing-board. But the point and shank of this particular tack was smeared with a semi-transparent, am-

ber-coloured gum.

"Unless I am wrong, gentlemen," said Sir Peter—his words came in a kind of tapping staccato—"this has been smeared with a poisonous resin, the secret of which handed down from the Carolina Indians is still known among certain of the old negroes who affect to practise voodoo. It is, you may say, a triple extract of moccasin or rattlesnake venom. That, however, is a matter soon proved."

Kneeling suddenly by the side of Shirley he thrust the tack into the lat-

ter's cheek to the head.

I caught at his arm, but was not in time. Even Lord Nairn, I think, was struck with horror at the deed. And as for Sir Peter, he rose from his horrid work shaking from head to foot.

"I have sworn," he cried in a high voice, "to be just. I have been just.

What I did was right-"

Lord Nairn's voice broke in upon him like a wave of something glittering and cold.

ing and cold.
"Right or wrong," he shrilled, "you

TRAGIC END OF A FARCE

have proved nothing. He was a dead man before he touched the ground. We have to thank Mr. Bourne for breaking a very worthless young man's neck."

It was true. I lifted poor misguided Shirley by the shoulders, and his head

hung down over his back.

"I heard it crack," said Lord Nairn. Here Mr. Santee Moore put in a word.

"For the sake of Shirley's family," said he, "let us agree to forget his treacherous attempt upon Mr. Bourne. But it is in your hands, Mr. Bourne—are we asking too much of you?"

"By all means," I said. "I will forget, or at least I will not speak. Nevertheless, I am heartily glad that I have

killed him."

XV. LORD NAIRN LEAVES HIS CHAIR AT HOME

SIR PETER and I started home at once, but Mr. Santee Moore remained with Lord Nairn to send out messages to Mr. Shirley's friends and relatives and to make a first disposition of the body. We had not gone far when I found that my mind had changed materially on two points. I was upset almost to the point of nausea to think that I had killed a man, and I no longer thought of Sir Peter as the fiend incarnate. I pitied him rather, he was so terribly agitated and horrorstruck. And it was not until I had got him home that he was able to think and speak lucidly. Here, however, he pulled himself together, drank a brandy-and-water, talked privately with Lady Moore for a quarter of an hour, and at last called me into his study.

"What has happened, Richard," he said, "has more beneath than appears. In the first place, we must exonerate Shirley in our own minds. Not entirely, but in this way: we must remember that he was weak, a lover, and, I have often thought, more under Lord Nairn's in-

LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

fluence than is human. What he attempted may or may not have been the act of a free agent. To my mind, however, it was based upon suggestion, hypnotic, let us say, or, at least, induced by a mental power that he was not fit to resist. I myself make a practice of not meeting Lord Nairn's eyes when in conference with him."

"And I," said I, "believe Lord Nairn responsible—at least for the invention. But we shall never know now if the tack was or was not poisoned."

"Not positively," said Sir Peter.

"Does it matter?"

"No," I said. "Tell me, Sir Peter, why was your brother referee? It seemed to me in very questionable taste."

"Matters look so serious, my boy," said Sir Peter, "that I will be frank even at my brother's expense. The luxury of his house and way of living is a farce, sir. He is over ears in debt. Lord Nairn holds his paper to a shocking amount. Santee is not a bad man. He is in trouble. A man in trouble is never quite himself. Why do we take Lord Nairn's passion for my niece so seriously? Because her father is vastly indebted to Lord Nairn. Because she loves her father to distraction. And because she will save him if she can. And now," said he, "I have exposed this damnable ulcer to you, and you can see

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for yourself that it is drawing to a head. Now, sir," he said, "I have no desire to see you turned into a burnt offering. So, tales or no tales, I ask for no promises—I will make what effort I can to get you out of the country."

"Hum," I said thoughtfully.

"Shirley's death will be laid at your door by his friends and blood relations. The matter of the thumb-tack will receive no especial promulgation, you may be sure. We ourselves have rashly agreed to say nothing about it."

"And Mary Moore?" I asked.

"The chase is closing about her, poor girl," said Sir Peter. He sighed deeply.

"She will be forced into marrying

Lord Nairn?" I asked hotly

"Oh, it looks so," said Sir Peter. "It looks damnably so. But what is a world without tragedy? We shall all be dust a hundred years hence."

"Surely," I said, "you and Lady

Wrenn can do something."

"If it came to war (Sir Peter smiled grimly) we could raise up but one fighter to Lord Nairn's two. You forget, sir, or you do not know that to the negroes Lord Nairn is the greatest of all the voodoos, past, present or to come. He would go among them with a moccasin hanging to his neck by the teeth—or some such fireworks—and the blacks, if only through thundering fear, would follow him through fire and water."

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LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

"And for all that," said I, "Mary Moore shall not be thrown to that poisonous hulk!"

There was no knocking. The door opened and Lord Nairn walked into the room.

"You are surprised," he said in his shrill, boyish voice, "to see me on my feet. Sir Peter will tell you that it is no uncommon business that takes me out of my chair. Come, Mr. Bourne, are you ready? Every moment is precious."

"Ready?" said I in some surprise.

"We know," said Lord Nairn "that Shirley's death was the purest accident. It will not be so regarded by certain hot-heads of his family. Rumour spreads very rapidly in this corner of the world. Come, sir. I have had the launch put in commission. We will whisk you out of the Santee before a man can pull a trigger."

"I have," said I, "accidentally killed a very murderous fellow. The law will not punish me for that. Nor do I think that I have any occasion to fear the vengeance of his blood relations. As to that of his closer relations—his partners in crime, let us say—that is another matter. I fear that as I fear Hell, Lord Nairn. But I do not propose to

run away."
"Deliver me," said he, "from pig-

headed youth."

"And me," said I, "from snake-minded age."

I hoped he would fly into a passion. Instead, he laughed shrilly. But now Sir Peter put in an oar.

"What have you done with the tack,

Lord Nairn?" he asked.

"Flung it overboard," said Lord Nairn. "It was obviously poisoned. We had agreed to say nothing at all about it. Why keep a dangerous instrument?"

"Generous impulses are as dangerous as poison," commented Sir Peter.
"Mr. Bourne, suspecting a treachery which was soon proved, struck with all his might. But we have agreed," he continued bitterly, "to let people think that that thunderbolt was hurled by mere malice. Ought we not to reconsider, Lord Nairn, and tell the whole truth?"

"If Bourne were one of us," said Lord Nairn, "yes. But he is not long for here. So let the Shirleys believe that that misguided youth put no blot upon the name."

"Misguided," said I, "seems to me

a happy expression."

"Come, come," said Lord Nairn, "if Shirley's attempt was spontaneous or if he was put up to it will never be known. The important thing is that he has been struck dead by our young friend, that the news has spread, and that the whole

LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

Santee is buzzing like a hive of angry bees."

"There is no one among us," said Sir Peter quietly, "who would care to close with a man whose mere slap is sudden death. One would have the fear that he would close his hand and strike from the shoulder."

"A shotgun concealed among the rice would have no such fear," said

Lord Nairn.

"Lord Nairn," I said, "you wish me to quit the country. It isn't because you have the least care for my life. Why

do you wish me to go?"

"You will be shot down in cold blood," he said, "and I shall have to punish the culprit according to law. He will be an old friend, perhaps, a member of a family of which I am fond. I wish the Santee to resume its peaceful and happy progress toward its ideals. And that, sir, is why I wish you to go."

"And you, Sir Peter," I asked;

"what do you wish me to do?"

"I am thinking," said he, "or trying to. Give me a moment." He rose mechanically and walked over to a bracket lamp that hung between the two windows. He climbed on a chair, leaned over and blew the thing out.

"It was beginning to smell," he explained. "It holds very little oil, and

they have forgotten to fill it."

Sir Peter had had two lamps lighted, because the night was hot and sticky. But whether his putting the one out was merely an ordinary domestic act, or whether he suspected the mine that was actually to be exploded by Lord Nairn and was preparing one counter to it, I do not know, but I think the latter. For having blown the one lamp out he returned, not to his former seat, but to a straight-backed chair immediately beside the other.

"Well, Richard," he said, "I cannot agreed with Lord Nairn. I think you will be safe enough in my house for the present, and later whenever you choose to go. I am determined to tell the whole truth about the duel. I will not be particeps criminis."

"But I," said Lord Nairn, a metallic

note of anger in his voice, "have given my word to say nothing about the mat-

ter, as Bourne gave his."

"I think that I made no promise,"

said Sir Peter.

"Silence, sir," said Lord Nairn, "in such circumstances was tantamount to consent."

"I am not agreed," said Sir Peter firmly. "I will tell the whole truth. And you, Lord Nairn, if you have sworn to say nothing, have not, also, sworn to contradict what I may say. If harm comes to Bourne it shall not be based upon so sickly a point of honour."

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LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

He reached swiftly for a pen and be-

gan to write swiftly.

"I will send a true account of this affair to the Shirleys themselves," said he, "first of all. And if I write notes all night the truth of it shall go to every person of importance in the Santee."

"So," said Lord Nairn mildly.

He towered in the shadowy room, at once a fearful and a wonderful figure.

"So," said he, "the Council disa-

grees."

"Lady Wrenn would vote with me," put in Sir Peter quickly. He had already addressed his note and commenced another.

"The Council disagrees," went on Lord Nairn without heeding the objection. "So, gentlemen, as chairman I must take it upon myself to be the deciding voice. Once and for all, Mr.

Bourne, will you go?"

"Once and for all, Lord Nairn," said I, "let us stand upon a basis of facts. You wish me to leave the country, not because as you have reiterated so often you are afraid for me, but because I think you are afraid of me. Fate brought me here, and I think in doing so Fate had a mind to raise up an obstacle in your path. And I think, Lord Nairn, that you think so, too. So let us finish with shilly-shallying. I will not go of my own will."

"Afraid of you, sir!" piped Lord Nairn in his shrillest voice. "Not, sir, while I have a live moccasin in each of my jacket pockets."

I admit that I turned very cold from head to foot. Lord Nairn laughed, not a pleasant laugh, and after a moment:

"So another kind of fiend," said he, "carries his hypodermic ever handy. Have no fear. I shall not waste my snakes on one who could not appreciate them."

He turned, opened the door into the hall and spoke a word of "sea-coast." Four negroes, immense, ugly fellows, black as the Styx, filed into the room. Two of them carried a great piece of fish-netting, each of the others had lengths of half-inch rope over his left arm.

"It has seemed at length necessary," said Lord Nairn, "to speed the guest upon his way."

Sir Peter rose.

"This is an outrage against the law," he said in a ringing voice.

"You will find," said Lord Nairn, "that in the Santee I am the law."

"That," said Sir Peter bitterly, "has been dawning upon some of us this

many a year."

"Lord Nairn," said I, "like many other great fellows has a fancy to be an emperor." I stepped quietly to the fireplace and picked up the poker. But

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LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

I was not destined to fight for my liberty.

Sir Peter by a lightning sweep of his arm sent the lamp by which he was standing crashing to the floor and we were in pitch darkness.

"Bolt!" he cried.

But I had no need of the suggestion. Before, I think, Lord Nairn or his negroes had moved an inch I was out of the window and in the garden. I heard Lord Nairn curse shrilly. The frame of the window was too narrow to afford

passage to his great bulk.

I took up my stand behind a clipped bush of box over which I could just see. The night, still young, was not very dark when your eyes became used to it. It was the sudden extinguishing of the lamp rather than the actual darkness caused thereby that had had so blinding an effect in the study. I stood and watched the house to see if any one came out, and had not long to wait. A door crashed open on the little garden porch and the tremendous form of Lord Nairn, looking huger than ever in the starlight, came dashing into the garden. Not to his snake eyes had the sudden darkness in the study been impenetrable. He had seen me plunge through the open window, and while endeavouring to follow he must have seen me hide behind the box bush. For now he came straight at it and, as it seemed, with the

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swiftness of the wind. They were right who said that the monstrous man could use his feet when he wanted to. He seemed as light upon them as is thistledown upon the wind.

For a moment or two I was like a thing rooted deep in the ground. thought of the snakes in his pockets and my hair rose into a bristling, electrified pompadour. My whole scalp tickled with it. I do not know how I got over my temporary paralysis, and only know this: that I could hear the breath in the creature's nostrils before I turned and ran—through hedges, over flower-beds and out of the garden gate. Then dashing to the left and skirting the garden wall I ran with all my speed for the next corner, turned that, passed the kitchen end of the house and ran along the side which faces the water. here a lucky thought entered my head. I turned once more sharply, this time to the right, made one great burst of it for the landing, snatched up a canoe, flung it belly down on the water, myself half in, half on it as a lad starts his sled at the top of a hill, and by the impetus was carried twenty yards from shore. Then I got to my knees and picked up the paddle that was by good fortune in the bottom of the canoe.

But Lord Nairn, who stood cursing upon the landing which his great weight half submerged, was unable to follow.

LORD NAIRN'S CHAIR

There were, it is true, canoes in plenty for those who chose to use them, and the broad-beamed, four-oared barge in which he himself had come with his henchmen. But his was not the figure for a canoe, and he knew it.

For a second I thought that he was going to plunge into the water and swim for it; and for a second I thought that he was going to throw one of his hypodermics at me, for he took a thick snake from his pocket, all the while cursing shrilly, and then hesitated and put it back. But presently he recovered himself. And his piping voice came across the stretch of water which I had widened by a spasmodic stroke of the paddle when I saw him put his hand into his pocket.

"Well," said he, "you have the better of it, Mr. Bourne. Did you show me your natural speed or was it only cowardice which furnished you with so pretty a pair of heels? I wouldn't venture far into the rice if I were you. You will only lose yourself and perish miserably. Still, please yourself. I'm not sure but what that would be, on the whole, the safest thing for you to do."

He turned without another word and walked slowly back to the house, only to return after a short interval with his four blacks. But I, you may be sure, had retreated into the rice and was

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keeping still as a mouse. But no effort was made to find me.

Lord Nairn seated himself in the stern of the barge, the negroes took their places at the oars and at a word of command rowed off into the night at a furious pace. When I could no longer hear the beat of the oars I paddled to the landing and went back to the house.

I was not a heroic figure, even in my own mind, I assure you. But I devoutly thanked my Maker for the pair of legs with which He had furnished me. And Sir Peter, when he saw me safe and sound, opened his thin arms wide and embraced me.

That night he had the approaches to his mansion watched. But no one came.

XVI. THE NEXT MORNING

Though no one came and there was no occurrence to excite apprehension, I passed a sleepless and a wretched night. To owe money that you cannot pay; to have failed in some obligation of kindness or courtesy; to be put down wrongly by a word to which you cannot find the answer upon the instant; or, in brief, to have done anything inconsistent with your own golden opinion of yourself; these things support consciousness far into the night.

I had run away as a schoolboy with stolen apples runs from the farmer. Nor could the imagining out of a different scene in which I played an unstanding and triumphant part comfort me. Nor did it comfort me that I had fled, not from a man, but from poison. Nothing, it seemed, could ever recover my self-respect for me. I was worse than the

hero of the lines:

He who fights and runs away Will live to fight another day.

which continually ran in my head. For I had not fought before running. I had scampered as a rabbit from a dog. And

when in the morning I joined Sir Peter and Lady Moore at breakfast it was to greet them with a hanging head. But they had only approbation for me and a piece of news that made my heart beat like a lion's. And I knew that I would not again run away either from poison or man.

"My brother," said Sir Peter, "was here very early this morning in a state of the most lamentable distress. His daughter, just recovered from her illness, went yesterday upon business connected with the hospital to Lady Wrenn—was with Lady Wrenn for half an hour and has not been seen or heard of since."

"If she has been abducted by that —" I began. But Lady Moore interrupted.

"I think that she has run away," she said, "to escape him—and her father."
Sir Peter looked grave and nodded

Sir Peter looked grave and nodded.
"I must confess," he said, "that my brother's anguish seemed to be of a mixed sort."

"I have waited till Richard came down," said Lady Moore, "to show you something. It concerns him more than you." She shook a sheet of notepaper, crumpled and soiled, from her lap and began to smooth it out. "There was a fire in the library," she said, "to take off the morning chill. While Santee was talking with us he took this note

THE NEXT MORNING

from his pocket, crumpled it and threw it into the fire. But instead of being burned the draft carried it up the chimney. You didn't think anything about it, Peter, but I saw him start and change colour. Being a woman," confessed Lady Moore sweetly, "I have about as much sense of honour as a hen. I sent half a dozen servants into the grounds to look for it. Coffee Pot found it."

Then, sure of her triumph, she motioned us to her side, and, looking over her shoulder, we read, in a bold, clear hand:

Father dear:

A month ago, yes. But now what you ask is impossible. Ruin is a little thing compared to what you ask. A month ago I should have thought it a greater thing. But now I can't. A month ago my duty was all to you. Now it is all to another. Even if I never see him again—

"Then she hasn't gone to him, whoever he is!" exclaimed Sir Peter. The note went on, over the page:

This is not a mere inclination, but a thing stronger than all the Santee put together. Tell Lord Nairn, and surely he will think better of himself and of you and of me. I cannot and I will not marry him. It is better for me to go away. When you can give me that protection which every man owes to a woman fly a white flag from the west gable. I shall manage to see it.

MARY.

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"So," said Sir Peter, "a month ago she'd 'a' done it."

"And now," exclaimed his wife, "she

won't."

"Now," said Sir Peter, "her duty is to another."

Suddenly the pair turned their eyes upon me.

"Oh, it can't be!" I cried, carried

away by the accusation.

"Listen to me," said Lady Moore.
"You have never seen Mary, Richard.
You will never see her as she was.
Since she found you and brought you home when you were hurt hers has been a different face. Do you think I'm the only one who has noticed it? If you do, how in Heaven's name do you account for Lord Nairn's efforts to get you out of the country?"

"They were else gratuitous," said Sir Peter. "Why should he have put up that beastly job with Shirley? He is not the man to do a murder without what seem to him the gravest reasons. He has assumed a kind of dictatorship," cried the hunchback bitterly, "by degrees subtly, until his is as absolute a monarchy as exists. But his rule has been on the whole for justice and fair dealing except only in this matter of his passions."

"The point is this," said Lady Moore, "that Mary is Richard's for

the asking."

THE NEXT MORNING

"I loved her at once," I cried, "that first morning in the garden when Sir Peter showed me an opening rose and said that it did not compare with her. I don't know why it should be so. It is."

"You were sent," said Lady Moore.
"I have always maintained that you were sent."

"But she can't care for me," I lamented; "that is an unheard-of impos-

sibility."

"Oh," said Lady Moore, "she was a changed girl after she brought you in. Every fifteen minutes, all that night, I kept bringing her word that you were holding your own. Once it seemed that you were not so well. And then—I knew. 'Why, Mary,' I said, 'what is this young man to you?' 'What?' said she. 'I knew him well,' she said, 'in Babylon. It would go hard with me,' she said, 'to lose him after ten thousand years.'"

I was trembling in every limb. "You never told me," I said.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, "I couldn't until I knew that you cared in the same way."

"It was damnably queer," said Sir Peter. "I had not talked with Richard five minutes before I was thinking of Mary. 'Now here's a young man come out of the sea,' I thought, 'bigger and stronger than other young men. Now,

I wonder,' I thought, 'if Fate has a finger in this? Pooh!' cried I, 'dress' him as other young men, probe him at little and you will be glad enough to be rid of him.' But it was not to be like that. It's damnably queer," said Sir Peter.

He rose briskly and clapped his hands as if to instil himself with energy.

"Now, then," said he, "it remains for us to find Mary and for Richard to marry her out of hand. So much is plain."

"Yes," said Lady Moore, "and you should send some one, or go yourself, to see if Santee is flying a white flag

from his west gable.

There was silence for a time.

"Is your brother," I broke out hotly, "capable of treachery to his daughter? Is he capable of flying a white flag, not to bring her back to his protection, but to get her once more in his power?"

"If Lord Nairn knows the contents of Mary's note," said Sir Peter, "he will have brought a tremendous pressure to bear upon my poor brother."

"Cannot you take up your brother's

notes?" I asked.

He shook his head briefly and named

an appalling sum of money.

"But, good God!" I said. "Bankruptcy may be a narrow and bitter way out, but it is gone through with every day in the year by some one or other."

THE NEXT MORNING

"Not as we go through it," said Sir Peter. "In an extreme case such as my brother's he must become the property of his chief creditor for a term of years. You have seen white men working side by side with negroes in the young rice. All our slaves are not black, Richard."

"And your brother's plan is to sell his daughter into slavery that he himself may escape doing a man's work

with a hoe?" I asked.

"Well, hardly that," said Sir Peter; "they would hardly put Santee at that sort of labour. But he might be compelled to wait upon those whom he had previously entertained. His alternative would be flight—in which case I have funds in London upon which he could draw in moderation—or suicide. As you say, he is asking a great deal of Mary. But he is, on the other hand, in a desperate case. He has a good knowledge of the marshes, but Lord Nairn watches him like a lynx. He has tried flight already—three times—only to be caught and persuaded back; always, of course, without scandal. So you see, sir, there is something to be said for my brother. Now then, I will go to Santee's at once to keep an eye on the west gable. I will leave some one to watch it when I come away. I will be back at noon. You, Richard, had better take Coffee Pot and make a little

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tour in the rice in case Lord Nairn

should call again."

"I'll go with him," said Lady Moore. And when Sir Peter had hurried off, "Richard," she said, "I know of a place—and no one else knows—where it is just possible that Mary Moore may have gone. Get your hat."

I rushed off for my hat almost as swiftly as I had fled from Lord Nairn, and for a Winchester, too, of big calibre. But Lady Moore and I were not destined to go upon that excursion.



For when I came back she was fumbling a great square, white envelope heavily sealed with red wax, and she was very much excited.

"Lord Nairn has not come," she said; "he has sent this instead. Oh,

why did Sir Peter go!"

"Is it to Sir Peter?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Open it, Lady Moore," I said.
"This is no time for ceremony."

"Ought I?" she said.
"I think you must."

She ripped open the envelope with a forefinger that shook and read the letter through, at first with a puzzled expression, then with a face of wonder and delight. She handed the letter to me and herself unfolded and began to peruse an inclosure that it had contained. This is what I read:

Believe me, Valued Friend, an old man's passion has boiled itself out. I apologise to you and to Mr. Bourne for my insane attempts of last night. There shall be no more violence. You may thank Mary Moore. I have loved her, as all the world knows, since

she was a child. But it was not until this morning that I realised that she could not, must not, belong to me. A man's passions blind him-especially in the case of an old man. I have only this morning learned that Mary has placed her affections upon your protégé, Mr. Bourne; though I have known (as my jealous actions bear witness) that Mr. Bourne's affections have centred about her since he first came among us. Since he has never seen her I do not rightly understand this, but the fact of it is mightily obvious. Naturally, though, my affections do not centre about Mr. Bourne. I wish him well only because his well-being is of paramount importance to one whom I love. Had Mr. Bourne not come among us, I must, I think, have married Mary in the end. I begin now to see what an enormity that must have seemed to the world. Let Mr. Bourne take her and go. This last I must insist upon for my own peace of mind. In giving them to each other I shall have done my part; in departing so that the sight of her happiness with another may not rankle in an old man's breast they will have done theirs. I have thrown your brother's notes into the fire. I have enough. More and more the love of my garden grows upon me. I shall, I must believe, since such is the consensus of human opinion upon the subject, outlive these present and past agitations. I have used what influence I have to promote Mr. Bourne's safety at the hands of those who were attached to poor Shirley, and I think that for the little while that he is to remain in the Santee he may come and go without fear. Do not trouble to answer at any length. Let Mr. Bourne fill out and sign the inclosed at his convenience and

A CHANGE OF FRONT

send it to me. Believe me, sir, an older, a wiser and a kinder man than him you knew yesterday.

Faithfully,

NAIRN.

This is what Lady Moore read and at once handed to me:

I ______, of _______, hereby promise to be joined in lawful wedlock to Mary Moore, she consenting, and within two days thereafter to leave the region of the Santee, not to return during the lifetime of Lord Nairn unless only upon his invitation so to do.

Sign_______

Witnesseth-

"He was always an odd stick," said Lady Moore. "But who would have thought of so peaceful an ending? And asking you to bind yourself in writing to marry 'Mary!" She laughed out loud.

"There is no ink nearer than the library." I said. "Come, good fairy."

"Sha'n't you even wait until Sir Peter comes back?"

"Lord Nairn expressly says 'at his convenience,'" said I, "and I'd find it mighty inconvenient to wait in such a matter." So we hurried off to the library and I signed and Lady Moore witnessed, and, my real mother not being in reach, I gave her a hug and a kiss.

After that we sent off the document

to Lord Nairn and waited about in a great state and excitement for Sir Peter's return.

He came back sooner than he had

promised and his face was grave.

"Santee was not there," he said, "nor any word left. There was a nigger taking down a white flag from the west gable when I arrived. He told me that he had put it up not an hour before; that a little before I came Mr. Moore had hurried up from the woods and told him to take it down and hurried off again. Now, several things may have happened—"

"First read this," said Lady Moore.
"It was addressed to you, but I opened

it."

"Did you?" said Sir Peter drily. He read Lord Nairn's letter through.

"Where is the inclosure?" he said.
"I signed it," said I, "and sent it

back to him."

"'Sign in haste," said Sir Peter, "'repent in servitude' is a Santee proverb. What has this precious document to say for itself?"

I repeated it to him, for I had it by

heart.

"Nothing to repent of in signing that," said I, "for a sane man."
"At least," said Sir Peter, but with-

"At least," said Sir Peter, but without enthusiasm, "the matter of the white flag is now explicable. Mary must have seen it or had word of it as

A CHANGE OF FRONT

soon as it was displayed. She returned at once and was intercepted by her father and they have gone somewhere together. So much is clear."

He frowned and bit his thin lips.

"Lord Nairn," he said, "on leaving here last night went at once to Santee's and was in conference with him for an hour. Santee, of course, showed Lord Nairn Mary's note. If at that conference they came to the agreement set forth in Lord Nairn's letter to me, why, I ask you, was my brother in such a state of mind when he was here before breakfast this morning?"

"Obviously," said Lady Moore,

"they came to no agreement."

"Not obviously," said Sir Peter.
"Possibly, yes, even probably. But, I

regret, I see no certainty."

"This is possible," I said, "that your brother said nothing to Lord Nairn about his daughter's note or the white flag, but that her note had determined him to fly that flag in good faith to bring her back and to protect her. At the last moment he determined that flight was the better part of protection and so intercepted her and went away with her. It is possible, Sir Peter, that your brother is playing the man."

"And," said Sir Peter very drily indeed, "hence his agitation." He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it may be as you say. If Santee and Mary are

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in hiding it may be very difficult to bring about this marriage which Lord Nairn now appears so anxious to make. They cannot in all probability get out of the Santee, but they can remain in it without discovery—well, for a very long time."

"There is nothing for it, then," said Lady Moore, "but to have patience."

"It is possible," said Sir Peter, "that Lord Nairn has also communicated his intentions to my brother this morning, and that Santee has taken his daughter to Lord Nairn's to thank him, possibly—and to see if his notes are really burned up."

And this, indeed, seemed to be the truth of the matter. For that afternoon about four o'clock Sir Peter heard

as follows from Lord Nairn:

"The wedding is for to-night at eight o'clock," he wrote, "if your candidate can be got ready. It will be at my house. Your brother and Mary Moore are here at the moment. The launch will be in readiness immediately after the wedding supper to pilot the happy pair out of the Santee."

XVIII. JUST BEFORE THE WEDDING

DEAR Lady Moore's one anxiety was as to what she should give us for a present. Sir Peter was aggravatingly calm, and I tasted of the eternities that may be contained within the confines of four hours. Four hours would not seem long if at the end of them you were to visit the dentist or to be hanged, but extending between a man and his heart's desire each is an age. I had not enough packing to occupy any length of time. If I had any affairs to settle it could only be done in New York. I did write out a will, leaving all that I was possessed of to my Beloved Wife, Mary, her heirs and assignees for ever, and this I signed and had witnessed in due form by Sir Peter and Lady Moore. I wrote, too, to Mary Moore at Lord Nairn's-the only love-letter that I was ever to write to her-as a bachelor. I shaved. Fifteen minutes later, unsatisfied with the result, I shaved again. I had nothing more orthodox in which to travel to New York than my brown linen suit, but I could telegraph my mother at the first opportunity to tell her of the marriage and to ask her to

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send more orthodox clothes to the hotel where Mary and I would go from the train. I missed my mother sorely. Though she would be cynical outwardly and in speech, it would hurt her for the rest of her life, if only a little, not to have been present at my wedding. Often during those ages of waiting and thinking I laughed aloud nervously.

Many people believe in love after a week; a few believe in it at first sight; but who will believe that it can spring into being when there has been no sight at all? Was Mary dark or was she fair? I only knew that beyond all others she was lovely and beloved. Yet there must have been a leaning upon each other of our spirits, for when at last we met face to face it was without strangeness or awkwardness. If she was more lovely to look upon than the imagination had pictured it is because the imagination is but a faulty instrument.

About seven o'clock we set out for Lord Nairn's, but in a barge rowed by four negroes and with an awning spread over us and our finery swathed in rubber, for it had come on to rain. We were very silent at first; it was to be my last voyage but one among the rice. My friends said that their hearts were a little heavy. And my heart—oh, it wasn't heavy, but it was too full for utterance. Once Sir Peter spoke and said

TUST BEFORE THE WEDDING

he hoped that I would not forget them. Once Lady Moore caught my hand in both hers and pressed it affectionately. She made me promise to write "always often." Sir Peter asked me if I intended to tell tales out of school. And I said that rightly or wrongly I would keep silent so long as I had friends in the Santee. "You," I said, "and Miss Stevens, and the McMoultries, and a few others. But," I said jokingly, "Lord Nairn will become an old-fashioned tyrant, and you will all fly to a new land to escape persecution, just as your ancestors fled to this." But Sir Peter took me seriously.

"I have feared it for a long time," he said. "I have been sending funds to England as I could spare themagainst the rainy day. But I was born in the Santee and it would go hard with

my heart to go into exile."

"And he that speaks so bitterly," said Lady Moore, "has a good wife." Sir Peter leaned over and patted her

knee. He said nothing, but he whistled softly his favourite:

Hey! the rover; Ho! the rover, Will you go roving

One by one rain-wearied mosquitoes took shelter in the inverted hollow of the awning and made their steady and

melancholy music. But they were too bedraggled to bite. Now the rain held up so that you could not tell if it was raining or not; again it smote upon the canvas with a sudden roaring. Now and again the bitter cry of a heron fell, as it were, out of the darkness. It was wonderfully dark. Often, master that he was of those channels, Sir Peter steered into the mud upon one side or the other, and once he made a false turn and we had to back out of an impasse. He bade one of the negroes light a lantern and stand it in the bows, and it was no sooner in place than he ordered it extinguished. And, indeed, there is nothing more baffling than a lantern near at hand on a dark night, distorting familiar, near-by objects so as to make them unrecognisable, and, of course, intensifying the darkness that surrounds its feeble aurora. They use them but little in the Santee.

I became terribly restless, fearing that I must be late to my bride and a laggard in her eyes. But Sir Peter only laughed and Lady Moore laughed. For at the very moment that I so expressed myself we were approaching Lord Nairn's landing. A sudden bend revealed it lighted by a single lantern, a small stage thrust out from a background of dripping trees, and in the water at either side, leaving the front clear for our landing, a school of barges

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JUST BEFORE THE WEDDING

and canoes. And in midstream a big naphtha launch with a cabin was maneuvring at a snail's pace to hold herself in the current until the way was open for her to be made fast to the landing. She showed no lights and was discernible half in, half out of the ring extended by the lantern; she was dripping wet and shone, here and there, like silver.

The rain came down in one of its sudden, roaring torrents, and they made me wait until that was over before leaving the shelter of the awning. When Sir Peter at length rose from his seat something fell with a thump into the bottom of the barge, and Sir Peter reached for it.

"What have you dropped?" asked his wife.

"My revolver," said Sir Peter. "Have you yours, Richard?"

"Yes," I said.

"But why?" said Lady Moore in alarm.

"Because," said Sir Peter drily, "as Mr. Shaw says, 'You never can tell."

Lady Moore came under my umbrella, and clinging tightly to my arm we walked quickly toward the house, Sir Peter following.

I have seen many a bridegroom hurrying to the altar and have accompanied two or three. But I never before heard of one in brown linen and a

rubber coat, a lady on his arm, an umbrella over his head, a revolver in his hip pocket, and an assortment of snake-bite remedies scattered among his others.

"My dear boy," said Lady Moore, "I sha'n't see you again alone. Good luck to you. And be good to Mary, not ninety-nine times out of the hundred, but all the hundred. Remember that to be successful in anything, but more especially in making others happy, it is the hundredth time that counts. Every man will look at your wife all her life, but you must be glad of that and proud of it. It is only a tribute to the freshest and most spotless beauty that God ever made. I, too, have seen the world in my day, London, Paris, Vienna, New York, and there was never another like Mary."

"But, dear Lady Moore," I said, "don't I know that?"

XIX. THE WEDDING

No sooner had our feet sounded on the brick floor of the verandah than the hall door was flung open and lights and the sounds of merry voices came forth; and grinning negroes took our coats and umbrellas and Lady Moore's tiny overshoes, and one came bearing a smoking negus upon a trav. Then we were ushered into the long drawing-room lighted, as it seemed, by hundreds of candles. And there was Lord Nairn himself, smiling and affable, with a whole garland of girls about his wheeled chair; and about the great punch-bowl at the other end of the room were old and young men in white linen, and there came from them bursts of laughter and the clicking of glasses. But when the word went around that the bridegroom had arrived your humble servant became the centre of attention. And those whom I knew as friends came with handshakes and kind words; and those whom I had never seen before had pleasant things to say. And there was much laughter because I had signed a paper binding myself to the marriage. Especially the McMoultries teased me.

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They said it was well known that in such matters I was slippery as an eel; it was not the first match, they dared say, that I must have consummated had I but put my name to a binding agreement.

"Say what you please, people," cried Janie McMoultrie, "I, too, have known what it is to listen to this gentleman's pretty speeches"—she affected to be very bitter. "But I have no document to prove it. I have only my word against his."

But I managed to get a word with

Miss Stevens.

"Have you seen her?" I asked. "Is

she sorry? Is she well?"

"She hasn't asked to see any of us," said Miss Stevens; "no, not even me. Her father is with her. And I believe her old mammy has dressed her—and there is Lord Nairn looking for you."

I had already, of course, spoken to Lord Nairn and thanked him for his change of attitude; but although he had been courteous and smiling we had neither of us enjoyed anything about the interview except its brevity. I had, indeed, found myself looking, not into Lord Nairn's face, but at his jacket pockets, and noting with intense relief that they were flat to his hips and appeared empty.

But now he had summoned me to him again. There was only Sir Peter

THE WEDDING

with him and a round-faced man in clergyman's dress and a white beard to his waist. Lord Nairn, smiling, was waving all others away when I came up. He introduced me to the clergyman—the Reverend Doctor Norton—and we shook hands.

"Mr. Bourne," said Lord Nairn in a quiet, confidential, but very frank tone, "is there any reason why you shouldn't be married? It is customary to leave this question open until the service; but, naturally, as your antecedents and former life are not known to any here, there is no one who can come forward and name an impediment. As it is, we shall have but your word. Yet I believe with Sir Peter that your word given to us now at so solemn a time must be the truth." The pale eyes held mine with much earnestness. Both Sir Peter and Doctor Norton drew closer to hear what I should say.

"I have a little property," I said; "there is no other woman in my life, nor any disease. There is no impediment, sir, unless the unwillingness of the bride or the general unworthiness of being so blessed, of which every man

has more than his share."

Lord Nairn's eyes remained unblink-

ing and steady.

"I am sure," he said at last, "that you have spoken the truth. I thank you. The ceremony will be in the adjoining

room. It wants still three minutes to eight. Doctor Norton, you will wish to put on your surplice. Be so good as to ask the chorus to strike up as you pass through the hall. By the way, who is the best man?"

He looked inquiringly at Sir Peter, who bowed and facetiously asked whom else Lord Nairn could suspect. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than there resounded in the hall a crashing chord of loud, sweet, negro voices; and to a wild chorus with a barbaric and thundering rhythm that set my pulses and almost my feet furiously going the company filed through double doors rolled wide open into the adjoining room.

A hand clutched my arm and I looked down into the brown, monkey eyes of

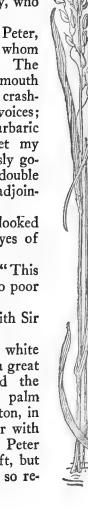
Lady Wrenn.

"Good luck," she cried gaily. "This will be a blessed day in Heaven to poor Lady Nairn."

I thanked her and moved on with Sir

Peter.

They had made an altar of white roses at one end of the room and a great wedding-bell of the same, and the whole room was a bower of palm branches and roses. Doctor Norton, in his surplice, stood before the altar with his thumb in a prayer-book. Sir Peter and I took our position at his left, but at some distance to one side, and so re-





"Then everything stood still" (page 80)

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mained, talking as naturally as my overpowering surges of nervousness and excitement would permit while the wedding guests seated themselves. Lord Nairn rolled his chair into a space left vacant for it in the front row, across the aisle from where we stood. A bridegroom notices strange and unimportant things when he is waiting for his bride, and I took an intense interest in the skill with which Lord Nairn manœuvred his cumbersome chair and finally backed it into place between Lady Moore and Lady Wrenn.

The doors by which we had entered were now closed by two negroes in white-and-mauve livery, the wild chorus in the hall came to an end and there was silence. Here and there chair-legs squeaked on the floor and dresses rustled as the wearers turned toward the closed doors so as not to miss any details of

the bride's entry.

"Sir Peter," I whispered faintly, "my legs are going. Am I wobbling much?"

"You look steady as a statue," he

grinned.

"Sir Peter, why is it so cold?"

"It's suffocating."

So I shivered and shook, with sym-

pathy from none.

And then suddenly the chorus in the hall burst out with a wedding-march. They had their air of Lohengrin—so

much I guessed. But the music they made of it was not Wagner's. It wasn't even civilised. But it was wonderful. I was delivered on the instant from my shivers and my shaking. My heart smote against my ribs with wild and glad percussions. And then the double doors were flung open, and mists covered my eyes, so that I seemed to be fighting to see and not able. I could hear murmurs and half-smothered exclamations for all the singing, but not for a moment or two could I see the bride sweeping slowly up the aisle upon Mr. Santee Moore's arm, and then I could not see her face for the cascades of lace that fell from the orange-blossom wreath upon her head. She was tall and stately, so much I could seeso much and the swaying of her white dress, and the tremulous movement of her lace veil.

There is an old saying that every woman looks lovely once: in her wedding-dress, going to the altar. And so on this occasion there must have been a real loveliness about that tall, graceful figure in the white silks and the laces.

But when Sir Peter whispered, "Step forward to meet the bride," I had turned cold as a stone and could not move.

"Come, sir," he said more loudly so that those in the front rows of seats

THE WEDDING

must have heard him; "what is the matter?"

Mr. Santee Moore and the bride had reached the head of the aisle and paused, hesitating. Mr. Moore turned to me and signalled with his eyebrows. I saw beyond them Lord Nairn leaning forward in his chair, a purplish tinge to his vast, pale face. But I did not move.

The singing stopped. I heard Doctor Norton saying, sotto voce, "Come, sir. Come, sir!" I saw the bride sway and totter, recover and clutch Mr. Moore's arm. Then, at the very moment when every eye in the room was upon me and Sir Peter urging me forward with a pressure of his hand in the small of the back, I found my voice and I cried loudly and wildly:

"That is not my Mary Moore!"

XX. THE MATCH

IT WAS strange that, of all that company who knew her well, I, who had never seen her, should have been first to know that this was not Mary Moore.

Sir Peter's hand tightened on my arm and he said quickly, "I feared a trick, but not this."

He made two strides of it to his brother.

"Who is this woman?" he asked fiercely.

"Mary Moore," replied Mr. San-

tee Moore.

You will imagine that there was hubbub and confusion; and so there was. Yet the guests kept their seats and in a measure acted as audience to the chief performers. Lady Wrenn alone came forward, as befitted her high station, to take a part.

"Is this your daughter, sir?" thun-

dered Sir Peter.

But his brother had not a pat answer to that. He was very pale and his lips twitched as if they were chapped. Lady Wrenn, however, knew the answer. At once gently, firmly and swiftly she lifted the lace veils that concealed the woman's

THE MATCH

face and flung them back over the woman's head. The face thus revealed was young enough and pretty enough for that matter, but it was not the face of a gentlewoman and it was pitiable with fright.

"Pooh!" said Lady Wrenn in her decided voice so that all could hear, "she is Isaac Moore's daughter. Her name is Mary, too. They are poor

white trash—aren't you?"

The poor girl writhed under the question and began to cry. But now Lord Nairn, without moving from his chair, played a card in the game. His shrill, penetrating voice pierced the farthest ears in the room.

"I have a paper," said he, "signed by the reluctant bridegroom, in which he binds himself to marry Mary Moore provided she is willing. As he has not specified in this agreement which Mary Moore let the ceremony proceed." He laughed a shrill, ghastly laugh.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lady Wrenn.

"If the bridegroom has a shred of honour," shrilled Lord Nairn, "he will give his hand to Mary Moore and lead her to the altar." Again he laughed his ghastly laugh. And I did come forward, for the wretched girl in the bridal raiment was weeping bitterly.

"Don't," I said quietly for her ears alone, "please don't. You are no more to blame for all this than the

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man in the moon. You were forced into it; everybody knows that. Even if you have been made willing to marry me you don't want to, do you? And you mustn't think that because I don't want to marry you that I despise you and want to see you hurt. Please don't cry so. I'm going to kill Lord Nairn for this in just a minute, then we'll both feel better."

"Make them stop billing and cooing," cried Lord Nairn, "and get down

to business."

I turned from the girl and caught Mr. Santee Moore by the hand.

"Where is your daughter?" I asked.

"I don't know," he faltered.

I began to crush his hand and tears came to his eyes and then a moan to his lips.

"Where is she?"

If he had known exactly he would have told me. I am very sure of that.

"In—house," he got out between his clenched teeth, "somewhere—don't know." He went very white and staggered backward. Sir Brash Sterling leaped from his seat and kept him from falling. I let go of his hand.

"Good people," I said loudly, "Mary Moore is in this house, somewhere, a prisoner. Our Mary Moore. Won't you scatter and find her? And I'll

question Lord Nairn," I cried.

Some of the men attempted to leave

THE MATCH

the room, but the double doors being opened disclosed a file of negroes with rifles, and a white man, grave and stern, in command. One man thrust aside the curtains covering a window, but turned away with an oath. Lord Nairn's shrill laugh kept on ringing in the room like a condition of its heavily-perfumed atmosphere.

I faced him as he sat in his great chair and looked him over. Presently he stopped laughing and returned my glance, composedly, with his cold, pale

eyes.

"Where is she?" I asked and approached him by a step, shaking my arms free in their sleeves.

"Well," said he, "since everybody seems banded against me, she's in this house somewhere."

I remembered now that I had a revolver in my hip pocket and I drew it.

"Exactly where?" I asked. "Get out of that chair of yours—I know how good you are on your feet—and lead me to her."

He did not answer. His lips closed into their mocking cupid's bow, at once so babylike and so sinister in the midst of that vast, pale face. How huge he looked! Even sitting he was taller than many a man standing.

"We shall have nothing to fear from your niggers," said I, "when you are dead. That will be when I have counted

three—if you do not take me to Mary Moore."

"Let me return you your signature," he said, "since it means nothing." He reached for an inner pocket.

"Stop," I said sharply, "no more

tricks."

I heard Sir Peter's voice.

"I have him covered, too," he said. "Well," said Lord Nairn, and he smiled now, "your passion seems genuine, after all. Since you and Mary Moore are intended obviously for each other you shall go to her." He yawned and raised his hands above his head in a kind of stretch. It must have been a signal to a confederate, for I can be sure that Lord Nairn had no other finger in the mechanics of what followed. The floor upon which I was standing fell and I fell with it—into darkness.

My left foot struck, ringing upon a floor of pavement or cement, but my right heel crushed something soft and unclean that crunched and crackled.

The trap-door which had dropped me into Lord Nairn's cellars closed back into place with sharp, steely sounds and I was in pitch darkness. I could not hear a sound of whatever activities may have been taking place in the room above, which I had so unceremoniously quitted. But I heard other things.

If I had ever wondered where Lord Nairn in winter-time when it is cold

THE MATCH

even in the Santee, obtained those frightful injections which had become necessary to him I had my answer now. There was more to that upon which my right heel rested than had been crushed. had killed something, but it could not rest as clean things rest when they are dead. I ground and ground with my heel—to the left!—to the right!—to the left!—to the right!—passion against that which I had killed and hatred of it rising wave on wave-to the right!—to the left! Sweat burst from every pore in my body, but not the hot, luxurious sweat of hard exercise in the sun. This had been iced in the polar regions of horror.

I could hear other things moving in that cellar all about me—a hissing here as in protest, a louder there as if in anger. And then, dispersing fear and horror as the sun disperses cold mist, there came from not far off the Voice.

me from not far on the voi

"Don't move!" she said.

I didn't move for a little, but only because of great wonder and exaltation.

"I dared not speak sooner," she said.
"I was afraid you would try to come to me."

"Do you think," I said, "that all the snakes in this that used to be Hell can keep me from coming to you?"

I laughed in the dark and went to her. Whether there were few moccasins in that place or hundreds I cannot know. It seemed to me that there were

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thousands. Be that as it may, God or His agent that is in each man's brain put my careless feet, step after step, where there was no harm.

"Don't trip," she said. "I'm on a table. Lord Nairn put me here. I haven't dared move. They can't get up." I reached out in the dark and found the edge of the table, waist high. The revolver with which I had threatened Lord Nairn so emptily was still in my right hand. I put it back in my pocket and stepped on to the table. And there we stood a while locked in each other's arms.

"Whatever might have happened to us," she said, "can't happen now. I

know that."

"They were mad," I said, "who thought that stone walls could make prisoners of us. Shall we go now? Or shall I first kiss you again?"

Afterward I felt of her face with the

tips of my fingers.

"It is as I thought," I said.

"There is a window back here," she said, "with iron bars. Give me your hand: I will show you."

"Stand back," I said, when my hands had found the bars wet with rain. "There is going to be a cataclysm."

I wrenched and the bars came away with half a hundred weight of brick and mortar. The next pair came away more easily.

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THE MATCH

The opening, shoulder high within, was at the level of the ground without. I lifted her through and followed. Then

she caught my hand in hers.

"This way to the ferry," she whispered gaily, and hand in hand like two children we hurried through the dark and the rain. But even she had a time of it in that pitch blackness to find the landing, for the single lantern had been extinguished or removed. Was I never to see her? Never?

Wet bushes struck us across the face; we found paths only to lose them. And then we guessed that we were in an open place that sloped before us. She spoke a guarded word in "sea-coast,"

but was answered in English.

"It's the captain of the launch," she

whispered.

"Hurry, Captain," she said, and she laughed. "We slipped off without being seen. Get us away before they find it out and come rushing down to fling

rice and old shoes at us."

"Hurry it is, Miss Mary," he answered and gave a command in "seacoast" to the engineer. We felt our way aboard and into the cabin. Presently we heard the propeller churning water under the stern of the launch, and a moment later the rippling at the bows and the grating of the launch's sides along the landing told us that we were at last under way.

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The captain spoke in the darkness.

"Lord Nairn's orders were to take you to Georgetown. Is that right?"

"Yes," said I, "or any other town

in the United States."

When the captain was gone Mary, who had not moved from the hollow of my arm, spoke:

"Have you a match, Richard?"

"No," said I in surprise. "Why?"
She was silent for a moment, and then, her cheek against mine:

"I thought," she said, "that maybe you would like to look at me." And

she hid her face.

I withdrew my arm gently but firmly, opened the cabin door and called to the captain, asking him for the loan of a match.

"Want to light up?" he answered. "We can navigate better without lights, sir—until, of course, we strike more open water, and then it'll be daylight."

"It isn't that," I said. "But at the last moment I received a present from my best friend and I want to look

at it."

He reached me a box of safety-matches and I went back to Mary.

The first match that I struck burnt itself out against the thumb and forefinger that held it. But I did not know this at the moment.

I only knew that the match had gone out.

AFTER-WORD

OF ALL the persons who figure in this narrative Lord Nairn alone remains among the marshes of the Santee. That is why I am now at liberty to lay these facts before the public, though not with much hope that the National Government will look into the case. I shall not be believed, even as Lord Nairn prophesied, unless here and there by a child. My mother even does not believe me. She says that my wife's

beauty has turned my head.

The hospitable mansions stand empty in the Santee unless Lord Nairn has had them pulled down. Sir Peter Moore and his Lady are living in England; Lady Wrenn, too. Sir Brash Sterling and his large family have gone to Argentine, Miss Stevens and Janie McMoultrie with them in the capacity of better halves. My wife's father has disappeared. Nellie and Granny Mc-Moultrie are touring the Continent-Granny, you may be sure, with an eye to visiting all centres where the best drugs are compounded in the greatest quantities. All have fled before the power and the growing wickedness of a man who, having demolished the old order of things, has made intolerable the new.

AFTER-WORD

There he sits at this moment, doubtless, in his wheel-chair in the hottest corner of his garden, served and enriched by those hundreds of ignorant sea-coast negroes who are his slaves in body and soul, fearing him more than death. There in his corner of the United States he sits and laughs at emancipation, holding men in bondage, smuggling, defying the law and cheating the gallows.

It seems to me as if I could see him in all his vastness (he will be in white now, having worn mauve long enough for poor Lady Nairn), his little golfcap on the back of his huge, baby head and his pale eyes gazing unblinkingly into the furious sun. Now he will lift a peach from the heap in his lap and

bite off the sunny side.

Or perhaps already the consequence of his frightful habits, which he himself fore-shadowed, has overtaken him; and he is on his hands and knees in the shrubbery, discovering at last what it feels like to be a great snake and to swallow a lesser by the tail.



